



JONAH
OF GATH-HEPHER
EDWARD A. MARSHALL.

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Jonah of Gath-Hepher

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By
EDWARD A. MARSHALL

Illustrations by
MRS. E. A. MARSHALL



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Preface



HIS volume is not intended to be an exposition of the book of Jonah. It is a story, perhaps for young people; using the life of the prophet as a basis and interweaving with it some of the customs of his time. It sets forth a few of the experiences of child life in Palestine, gives brief descriptions of the land and unfolds bits of Bible history. It tries to picture Jonah as he thought and felt and acted. Perhaps some may feel in this that the author has been presumptuous because he seemed to be adding to the Scripture record. But such a thought was farthest from his mind.

Being asked to write a story and having lived in Palestine, it was natural there to cast a line for a subject. The deciding lot fell once more upon the prophet Jonah. May the result of this lot to the reader be as that lot to the

prophet, may it discover him to himself. But may the reader not have gone so far in self-will that he finds no way back but through the deep sea. Doubtless many have condemned Jonah for his disobedience in that far-away age who themselves are not quite willing to obey God's call to go to the Ninevehs in heathen lands to-day. Is the heart that leaves cities and nations in the throes of idolatry now any different from the one that in a less enlightened age fled to Tarshish and left the Nineveh of old to perish in its sin and shame?

May this volume find a useful mission in the world of books and help to convince some doubting soul that God's way is best.

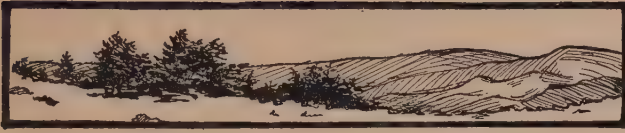
E. A. M.



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I. The Welcome Son



ATH-HEPHER, in the land of Zebulun, was a charming place for a boy to live in. Nature was a generous teacher there and provided many interesting object lessons. It was one of two hundred villages situated in the far-famed province of Galilee, the province known in later times as the home of the Saviour, from which He was called the "Galilean." It was fitting that Nature should lavish her treasures upon this favoured section.

The country round about was mountainous, the hills rising higher to the north, until they joined the great Lebanon range of Syria. Living springs, like gigantic fountains, burst from the hillsides, streaming down in pretty brooks and rivulets in which the lads used to fish and play. What pleasure they found, too, climbing among the leafy branches of the spreading syc-

more, gathering the wild flowers that carpeted the earth in early spring, or resting in the shade of an old fig-tree when the heat of the day grew too intense.

Orchards of olives and figs grew in abundance around the villages, furnishing plenty of fruit for their owners and some to be sold in the markets. The gathering of these fruits was a work which the boys especially enjoyed. Their nimble movements made it easy for them to pick and sort the figs and spread them out to dry, and they were fond of shaking down the olives and gathering them for the press.

Wild animals were abundant. Sometimes lions came up from the jungles of the Jordan or wandered down from the forests of Lebanon and struck terror to whole neighbourhoods. Leopards, wolves, jackals and hyenas were quite common throughout the country and gave much trouble to the inhabitants by their thievish habits. It was difficult to kill them with the weapons of those times, a fact which allowed them to become numerous and bold. They prowled around the towns at night in search of dead carcasses or living lambs or chickens which might be easily stolen and borne away. But not all the animals of the land were wild and savage. The deer, gazelle and coney were easily domesticated and made family pets, while the horse, the mule, the sheep and

the goat were the universal servants of the people.

Birds were to be found everywhere, for there were over two hundred varieties within the bounds of Zebulun. Some were quite tame and built their nests upon the housetops or in the trees near by, while others hid in the forests and flew away rapidly at the approach of human beings. One was called the "foolish sparrow" because it built its nest in lonesome, rocky places and never ventured near the habitations of man. Owls and bats were avoided because the boys believed them to be birds of evil omen, while ravens were considered thieves and were pelted with stones. Quail-hunting was a favourite pastime, the delicious food thus secured adding zest to the otherwise exciting sport.

Thus the land of Zebulun was a source of ever increasing interest and education to its wide-awake youths. They were not hampered like boys who live in crowded cities. They had broad fields and rocky, forest-covered hills where they could roam at pleasure. The book of nature opened to them its treasures, and cultivated in them the wisdom so often seen in the words of the patriarchs and prophets.

The obscure village of Gath-hepher would never have become known in history had it not been the birthplace and home of the prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai. It was the good

name of his father that made the child so welcome on that morning, long ago, when the joyous news, "Amittai has a son!" passed from one to another of the village people. None, however, dreamed of the great name he would attain for himself in after years.

"Peace be to thy house," was the common salutation of the villagers as they greeted Amittai that morning.

"My blessings on thy son," said Shelah, the merchant, as Amittai stepped into his shop.

"And mine," exclaimed Shallum, the fish peddler of Galilee, who was standing by.

"Thanks to thee both," replied Amittai. "I trust the child will bring much honour to our humble village."

"Even as thou hast," returned the merchant.

"What name will he bear?" inquired Shallum. "I suppose thou wilt give him the name of some great man in Israel."

"Nay!" replied Amittai; "we will put upon him no such burden, but will let him work out his life with a name all his own. 'Tis the parent's part to guard his offspring and allow no millstone to be hung about its neck."

"Thou art beginning well," said Shelah. "The child will thank thee when he hath become a man and hath brought honour to thy family through some valiant deed for Israel."

Amittai with aroused interest declared: "We

Hebrews differ greatly from the heathen Canaanites around us, for we love our little ones, and our manner of bringing them up excelleth that of the Canaanites as the day excels the night."

"It is our religion which doth exalt us," remarked Shelah, stepping aside to wait on a customer who had just entered the shop

Shallum had met the Canaanites much in his travels and knew their manner of life. "The Canaanite children grow up like animals," he declared. "Their parents do not seem to take interest in them."

"'Tis true," responded Amittai. "They give their children but little heed, nor consider them worth aught until they begin to earn silver for the bag."

"And their evil ways hath wrought much harm in Israel," continued Shallum. "The young men of our nation now think our manner of life too strict, yet we are not a tithe as strict as the law of Moses doth command."

Amittai's face flushed as he declared, "My voice is against every man who thinketh his son is not worth his training. What manner of men would we now be had not our fathers instructed us?"

"What name wilt thou give thy son?" asked Shelah, returning from his customer.

"We think to call him Jonah," replied Amittai.

"Oh," laughed the merchant, "that is thy wife's choice, I am sure, for it meaneth 'a dove.'"

At that moment Nathan, the chief man of the village, entered the shop, and seeing Amittai, greeted him with, "Peace be to thee and to thy house, Amittai. I hear good news. Thou hast a son."

"Yea," said Amittai, smiling. "God hath richly blessed us."

Shallum interposed saying, "They will call his name Jonah."

"Jonah," repeated Nathan. "How excellent! Our custom in naming children is most beautiful, for each name hath its own significance."

Many English names of to-day are significant, though we seldom think of their meaning. With the Hebrews the name and meaning were always thought of together. They often named a child after some natural object, such as "Terah" (wild goat); or "Tamar" (palm tree). A child might receive a name to signify its physical condition, such as "Shiprah" (beauty). Often the name linked the life with God, as "Nehemiah" (Jehovah hath given). Sometimes a name indicated a national sorrow, as "Ichabod." Surnames were not used. A person received his tribal or national distinction by linking his name with that of his city, as "Nahum, the Elkoshite."

The conversation in Shelah's shop continued

for some time, after which Amittai started home to carry the cheerful greetings of his fellow townsmen to the happy mother.

"My blessings on the boy," said Nathan as he parted from Amittai on the way.

"Thou honourest us highly, friend Nathan," said Amittai. "I will show him to thee soon, if he do well."

When the child was eight days old he was taken to the priest for the ceremony of circumcision, after the custom of the law. "We will call his name 'Jonah,'" said Amittai, when the priest came to the naming of the child. The priest then gave his charge to the parents, admonishing them concerning the teaching of their son, as required by the commands given unto Israel by Moses.

Jonah's babyhood was quite different from that of children in our part of the world. When he was born he was rubbed all over with salt or washed in salt water. Then his arms and legs were bound tightly with swaddling clothes so he could scarcely move lest some injury come to him while his bones were soft. In this way his mother could strap him to her back and carry him about with the least inconvenience. Babyhood in Eastern lands often continues a long time, the children not being weaned until they are two years of age.

The upbringing of Jewish children was con-

sidered a most important matter and received much attention from the parents. Dr. Edersheim gives an interesting outline of the undertakings and attainments scheduled for the Jewish boy and man, as follows : " At five years of age reading the Bible ; at ten years, learning the Mishna ; at thirteen years, bound to the commandments ; at fifteen years, the study of the Talmud ; at eighteen years, marriage ; at twenty, the pursuit of trade or business (active life) ; at thirty years, full vigour ; at sixty, commencement of agedness ; at seventy, gray age ; at eighty, advanced old age ; at ninety, bowed down ; at one hundred, as if he were dead and gone and taken from the world."

It is a long road from childhood to old age and the way is strewn with many surprises. Some of them are very tragic as seen in the life of the boy of Gath-hepher.



II. School Days



THE years of Jonah's infancy passed quickly and he began to mingle with the other children of the neighbourhood. His disposition was like that of most boys, cheerful, resolute, enthusiastic and generous when rightly handled, but sometimes willful when his desire was opposed. Though it was plain that he would have some hard lessons to learn because of his self-will, yet he needed only the right training to become a useful man.

Hope and expectation grew in Amittai's heart as he saw his child developing from day to day, and like a wise father he placed around him such company and influences as would most develop a manly character.

"I trust," said he one day to his wife, as the child played before them, "I trust that our son may be given many days, and

may wax strong and valiant against the enemies of Israel."

"May it be even so," said Miriam. "Jero-boam hath cursed our land with idolatry and it will take a strong man, under God, to redeem it."

"Miriam," said Amittai as he glanced lovingly towards her, "let us make it our daily prayer that God may choose our baby to be that deliverer."

"With all my heart," cheerfully responded Miriam.

The home in which Jonah was born and in which he grew up was like the homes still to be seen in the villages of Northern Palestine. It consisted of a one-story building, rectangular in form, built of white rock from the limestone quarries found so abundantly in the country. At one end of the house was a courtyard enclosed with a high wall. In this yard the domestic animals were housed at night to protect them from wild beasts and from men who gained their living by stealing. It was in this yard that Jonah spent much of his time while a boy. The animals became his pets and afforded him much enjoyment when none of the children of the neighbourhood were there to play.

The roof of the dwelling was supported by a double archway of stone, the ends of which rested upon the four side walls of the house.

The top was then covered with earth, the upper coating being composed of thick clay which was beaten down like a pavement. Roofs thus constructed were favourite gathering places for the people after the heat of the day. It raised them above the busy surroundings and afforded a little privacy where they might catch the cool breeze of the evening. Jonah and his playmates often enjoyed their games, upon the spacious flat roof, running up and down the stone stairway which led from the courtyard below. As far back as in the days of Moses divine command was given that each roof should be surrounded with a low wall called a "battlement," to keep the children, and older ones, too, from falling off.

The interior of the home consisted of one large room, divided into two parts. The floor was of earth like the roof, and became very hard from the constant treading of feet. One-half of the room was raised two feet and devoted to the family, while the lower half afforded shelter for the animals in cold, or stormy weather. On the line separating the two sections of the room was the trough, or manger, from which the animals ate; this was built sufficiently high to prevent them from intruding upon the premises of the family. At the back of the family end of the room, the household property was kept, both clothing and food.

It was in such an environment that Jonah passed his boyhood. The crowded condition made him familiar with all the details of the home. He often watched his mother draw a little meal from the barrel, add to it a little oil from an earthen cruse near by, and bake it into a cake over the fire which burned within a triangle of stones in the centre of the room. He liked to catch the meal as it fell from between the millstones while his mother ground the supply for the day, and to accompany her to the village well where she obtained the jar of water for the use of the family.

At night, Jonah rolled out a little padded quilt for his bed. In the morning he rolled it up again and placed it in a niche in the wall where the family bedding was kept.

He early learned to observe the courteous customs of his people. When friends of the family came to visit, he would drop on his knees and touch his forehead to the floor, expressing to them a most gracious welcome. Sometimes he would make a polite bow, placing his hand over his heart to indicate the sincerity of his greeting. Often, too, he would take the hand of the visitor in his and kiss it as a mark of special friendship. All these greetings were accompanied by expressions of welcome such as, "Peace be unto thee."

Among all the things that entered into Jonah's

early training none interested him more than the Scripture stories and commands which he learned from listening when his father read the Sacred Writings.

These days of pondering over the Mosaic teachings were very happy and profitable ones to Amittai and his family. To the Hebrews the Scripture parchments were very precious, because each had to be written by hand and was, therefore, not only very expensive but also difficult to obtain. The days of printing and of books had not yet come, so that the home which possessed a copy of the sacred scroll was generally one that was both pious and well to do. This possession marked the standing of the family in the village as being unusually good, especially if the household was known to occupy a portion of the day in reading and meditation.

Moses had commanded that parents should teach their children the statutes of Jehovah and the meaning of the sacrificial services: the practice became a custom throughout Israel. Amittai was faithful in this duty and Jonah would often sit and listen while his father read aloud even before he could understand the meaning of the strange ceremonies and feasts which Jehovah had commanded Israel to observe. Thus the boy's mind was early trained in spiritual things.

"When will father read again to me those

stories about Joseph and Samuel?" he asked of his mother one day when he was about five years of age.

"Bless thee, my child. When is mother's boy going to learn to read for himself?" asked Miriam affectionately.

"Could I learn to read like thee and father?"

"Yea, that thou canst, my son."

"Could I learn to-day?"

"Not all, but thou couldst begin."

"Now?"

"Yea, and I will give thee aid, for thy father hath much to do this day." All work about the house was cheerfully left that Jonah might take his first lesson in reading.

"We must needs have a tablet to write upon," said Miriam. "Where is father?" and out they went, hand in hand, to find Amittai.

As Amittai saw them coming he called, "Welcome, my little man. Comest thou to help me prop up this olive tree that was injured by last night's storm?"

"Oh, nay, father!" said Jonah, impatient for his tablet.

"What! Canst thou not help father?"

"Nay. If it please thee, father," said Jonah, his lip beginning to quiver, "I desire a tablet to write the letters upon."

"Well, indeed! Doth my son desire to learn to read? Of course he shall have a tablet, the

choicest of all the Hebrew boys in Gath-hepher." Jonah burst into a bubble of laughter through his tears at the prospect of a tablet.

"And who is to be the teacher?"

"Mother hath promised to give me the first lesson," said Jonah proudly.

"What a splendid teacher!" said Amittai, as he smiled lovingly on the two by his side.

Hand in hand they walked to Amittai's shop, where he selected a clean piece of board, which in a few minutes he had smoothed into a tablet.

"There," he said, placing it in Jonah's hands, "mayst thou learn to read speedily all the words spoken unto us by Jehovah."

"Thank thee, dear father," responded the happy boy, his face beaming with delight.

"Now we will have our first lesson," said his mother as she led Jonah into the house.

Seated on the floor beside her pupil, Miriam dipped the reed pen into an old ink-horn and wrote the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, then the second, then the third, naming each and having Jonah say it after her.

"Aleph, Beth, Gimel," she pronounced.

"Aleph, Beth, Gimel," Jonah repeated.

Forward, backward, and skipping around, went Miriam's finger pointing out the letters until Jonah knew each of the three distinctly.

"I'm learning to read!" shouted he with triumph, and dashing out into the yard he ex-

claimed, "Come with me, father! I have something to show thee!" Amittai left his work and Jonah proudly marched into the house leading his father by the finger.

"Father must hear me read," Jonah exclaimed.

"Aleph, Beth, Gimel," said he as his chubby little finger sought out the letters he named.

"But let me point," said Amittai, thinking he could catch him. Backward and forward, around and around went Amittai's finger, but not once was Jonah mistaken.

"Jonah hath been victorious," laughed the fond mother as she clasped her happy pupil in her arms.

"Thou couldst not catch me, father, couldst thou?" said the roguish youth.

With a light heart Amittai went back to his work. "'They shall be like olive plants around thy table,'" said he to himself.

Jonah's joy knew no bounds. His mind had received a fresh awakening, and a new storehouse of knowledge had opened to him. "I'm learning to read," shouted he to his playmates.

"Thou fearest to show thy skill," defiantly exclaimed Hobab, a boy whose parents thought him too young to learn, though he was six months older than Jonah.

"Come and I'll show thee!" declared Jonah. As they entered his home he exclaimed:

"Mother, wilt thou be pleased to reach my tablet? Hobab desireth to see me read."

Miriam brought out the wooden tablet and Jonah began: "Aleph, Beth, Gimel," he read in triumphant tones as he pointed out the letters.

Hobab's pride was stung. It was all a puzzle to him. "Thou shalt not learn more than I," he cried, rushing out of the house. Dashing into his own home he exclaimed: "Father, Jonah is learning to read. Wilt thou not teach me?"

School began in another home that day.



III. Religious Training at Home



MONTHS passed into years while Jonah was learning to read, but it was not time lost. As soon as he had mastered the alphabet, Amittai began teaching him to read the words of Moses from the sacred parchment.

When the Hebrew children were learning to read the Scriptures they were required to read aloud in order to acquire fluency. Leviticus was one of the first books to be read, because it contained the ordinances necessary for the Hebrews to know in order that they might worship properly during the great feast days at Jerusalem.

Many questions did Jonah ask about the sacrifices and feasts as Amittai guided him in the reading. "Why dost thou do all these things?" he inquired one day.

"God hath given them to us to teach us about Himself," replied Amittai. "They are objects from

which we learn, just as thou dost learn from thy playthings. Dost thou know why we kill the lamb for the sacrifice?"

"Nay, father."

"It is because God commanded us so to do in remembrance of our deliverance from Egypt," explained Amittai. "Long years ago our people lived there and the king made them slaves."

"Did they have to toil long and hard?" queried Jonah with interest.

"Yea, they had to build royal palaces, and temples, and great pyramid tombs. The king gave them no straw to use in the bricks they were compelled to make, and then beat them if they did not fulfill all their tasks."

"How did they escape from so cruel a king?" asked Jonah.

"God delivered them," said Amittai. "He sent plagues upon the Egyptians through Moses and Aaron until they let them go. The last night of the plagues an angel of death smote the oldest son in every Egyptian family."

"Did He smite the Hebrews, too?" queried the anxious listener.

"Nay, God let the Hebrews live. He gave warning unto Moses that a lamb should be killed for each Hebrew household, and that the blood should be sprinkled on the door-post. That night an angel with the power of death came to Egypt and slew the first-born of all the

Egyptians because they despised God ; but when the angel saw the blood of the lamb on the Hebrew homes he passed over them. Every year since then the Hebrews kill a lamb on that same day of the year ; it is called the Pass-over. This lamb represents God's Anointed One who is coming to save us. He will take our place and die for us that our sins may be blotted out. Every one who offers a lamb shows that he trusts in this Anointed One to save him."

"Will He save me?"

"Yea, my son. Trust thou in Him and do His will," replied Amittai.

For the first time in his life the lad saw the relation between his sin and the lamb that was offered in his place.

"I am glad that to-morrow is the Sabbath," Jonah often remarked as the sixth day of the week came around. "Father will teach me more of the Scriptures."

Sabbaths in Israel were almost wholly devoted to spiritual things. No fires were built, no food was cooked, no journeys were taken, no work was done ; it was Jehovah's day. It was spent at home, for there were rarely services in the villages to attend. Years after the time of our story the Hebrews who returned from exile instituted the synagogue, after which it became customary for the villagers to assemble there for a Sabbath service, consisting of the singing of Psalms, the

reading of Scripture, and oral instruction from a priest, or elder.

During his youth, Jonah was taught many things regarding ceremonial cleanliness. Dead animals were to be especially shunned. At his play he had to be careful not to touch one even by accident, or to go near a grave. He dared not pick up a bone, or touch any creeping thing which had no wings. He was early taught that the eating of blood, or the flesh of swine, was strictly forbidden. If he became defiled through any of these causes it was necessary for him to keep away from all other children for seven days and for his father to offer a sacrifice to make him ceremonially clean. If during the period of his defilement he touched any other child, that child, too, became unclean. Each then had to be quarantined as we quarantine those who have smallpox or diphtheria.

"Father, why dost thou touch that case on the door-post when thou comest into the house?" asked Jonah one day when they came from the market.

"That small metal case, my son, contains the promise of Jehovah to protect our home. It is a reminder of the blood sprinkled on the door-post in Egypt of which, thou rememberest, I told thee one day."

"Wilt thou teach me the words in the little case?"

"Yea, that will I gladly do," said Amittai, as

he arose and went to the door. Opening the case, he unfolded a small parchment upon which were written twenty-two lines of the Hebrew Scriptures, and read them slowly.

“Father, wilt thou teach me to observe this as thou dost?”

Amittai reverently touched the shining case, then kissed his finger and repeated: “The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.”

Jonah tried to remember the words which protected their home, for he, too, felt the need of Jehovah’s loving care. He ever afterwards touched the shining case and repeated the promise when he went out or came into their dwelling.

This dependence upon Jehovah was instilled into the minds of all the children of the Hebrews when very young, not only because it had been so commanded by God, but because they were living in the midst of bitter enemies and needed His constant, divine protection. Under His care they felt secure. He had brought them into the land and promised it to them for an unending possession upon condition of obedience.

No other race was ever given such a deed to any portion of the earth. The Hebrews were thus favoured because they were the children of the promise and the custodians of the Oracles of God. They were given this land so that they

might live out God's teachings, though it is sad to record that long before the days of Amittai and Jonah, Jeroboam had introduced false worship and corrupted many of the people. Yet during all the years of decline and apostasy there were those, like Amittai, who faithfully maintained the old faith of their father Abraham. Some of the men of Gath-hepher had gone over to the heathen worship, but the best citizens had remained true to Jehovah.

The common social and business meeting place in Gath-hepher, as in all Oriental towns, was at the gate of the city; but it was a noisy place and many who came were rough idolaters, so the better class preferred to meet at the hospitable home of Amittai on the edge of the village. His good character and broad knowledge drew there the noblest men of the village. Often after the harvest season they gathered during the evening on the flat roof of his house and discussed the topics of the village and of the times.

"These gatherings at Amittai's are much to our profit," said Shallum to Nathan one day at the market. "How proud he is of his son!"

"Indeed, a goodly lad he is; and were it not for these meetings we should be as ignorant as sluggards concerning the things which take place round about us."

"We could not find a better place to meet. The stairway runs up on the outside of the house

to the roof above so that any one can come and go as he will."

" 'Tis for that reason I go so often," responded Nathan. "I should be loth to go if we always disturbed the family."

"Of a surety we shall have a meeting of profit the next time we assemble," declared Shallum as they separated.



IV. Shalmaneser the Terrible



PREPARE for war! Prepare for war!" was the cry that stirred Gath-hepher to its depths. The king had sent out his swiftest runners from Samaria to warn the villagers of a rumour that had just reached him to the effect that Shalmaneser, the great and terrible ruler of Assyria, was marching westward with a large army. Although there was no declared hostility between the two nations, yet the greed of kings made wars of conquest always possible. Israel had paid tribute to Assyria during the days of King Jehu, and it required no stretch of imagination to surmise that Shalmaneser's treasury was empty after his winter's debauch and that he was now starting out for plunder among the nations to refill his purse for another season. Israel, though five hundred miles from his capital, presented temptation to the rapacious monarch

because of its prosperity in sheep-raising and agriculture. The Hebrews had enjoyed peace for so many years that this alarm stirred them to unusual excitement.

That night Amittai's roof was thronged with anxious men seeking the latest news.

"Who hath heard the runner's message?" shouted Shallum as the excited villagers gathered on the housetop.

"Not I!" said Nemuel. "I have been over the northern hill in my field all the day."

"Nor I!" responded a chorus of voices.

Rumours were all that could be gathered until Shelah, almost breathless, came hurrying up the stairs.

"Didst thou see him, Shelah?" "Didst thou hear anything?" "What causeth this tumult?" were questions that came quickly from the anxious company.

"Indeed I saw and heard him, too," declared the panting merchant.

"Tell us quickly. What said he?"

The jolly merchant was sad for once. There was no chance for mirth in the terrible message the runner had left as he hurried breathlessly through the village. With difficulty Shelah continued :

"Hearing a loud voice in the direction of the market I hastened into the street and there beheld the king's runner. His face seemed like a

glowing coal and he nearly fell from exhaustion. Between his panting breaths I caught the words, 'Shalmaneser is coming! Prepare for war! Signal trumpets will be blown from the mountain tops.' "

"Shalmaneser coming!" echoed the company, their faces growing white and crimson with fear and rage.

"That means war for every man in Israel!" shouted Bariah, the blacksmith, springing into the centre of the group and shaking his clenched fist towards the east.

Nemuel, a timid peasant, remembering vividly the tortures of Shalmaneser over fifteen years before, groaned out, "It means we all must die."

At once they began to discuss the gravity of the situation.

"What will be required of us, Amittai? Thou knowest most about the methods of war."

"Men of Israel!" cried Amittai, "thou knowest treacherous Assyria."

"That we do," shouted a chorus of voices.

"Can any nation of our times be likened unto it for brutality?"

"Nay, nay!" groaned Nemuel.

"Its life is grossly immoral, after the character of its heathen gods. Its conquests are all for plunder!"

"They will obtain nothing here, if they come!"

interrupted the blacksmith, his face crimson with rage.

"It is a tyrant to all its vassal provinces, and carrieth the wealthy and most influential to its own empire where they will be helpless to resist."

"Curses on them," cried Shallum, spitting with hatred and revenge in the direction of the advancing army.

Amittai continued: "If Shalmaneser captures us, what may we not expect from his hands? We may be dragged to death under threshing instruments! Or, as prisoners, we may live the remainder of our days under the iron heel of a nation whose rage burns to a furnace heat against the people of Israel." These words of Amittai stirred the Hebrew blood to the point of action.

Even little Jonah, who had crept in by his father's side, shook his clenched fist towards Assyria and exclaimed, "Suffer me to go and fight them, father."

"Not yet, my son," answered Amittai, smiling, and patting the lad on the head.

"But what hath Israel done to Assyria?" murmured Nemuel.

"Nothing!" shouted Bariah. "The Assyrians are robbers!"

"Then why do they trouble us? We are poor and despised," Nemuel continued.

"They covet our land," hissed Shallum.

"I'll tell thee why they desire our country," cried Amittai, addressing the younger men. "Our beautiful country just lies between Assyria and Egypt, and Egypt is the lifelong enemy of Assyria! The grain bins of Galilee would give food to the army of either nation until it could starve the other to death. Therefore thou seest whichever conquers us will have its enemy half beaten." As he finished, he looked down to see if Jonah had understood this geographical key to the situation.

Advancing to the centre of the group, Elkanah said earnestly: "It is all our own fault that these nations covet our land. Thou knowest well that only a few miles to the south there runs across Palestine the great caravan road which has been the highway of nations since man began his tribal migrations on the earth."

"We have let them overrun us too long," shouted Shallum.

"Let us appeal to the king that this highway be closed at once. We will be far more secure," exclaimed Nemuel.

Excitement was running high when Nahash, who had just returned from the sea of Galilee, advanced and said: "I hope this alarming report is not true. Only this morning down at the sea I heard that some Assyrians, who had been living there, had suddenly gone northward towards Damascus."

"May it be Syria rather than Galilee that will be dragged under those threshing instruments," said Nemuel.

"God grant it," responded Amittai, as he clasped Jonah's trembling hand in his.

"We are not alone in our fears," said Shelah, the merchant, "for last week as it fell to my lot to pass a day in Tyre, I heard an aged seller of Assyrian fabrics say that they believed Shalmaneser would soon try his sword on them."

"May his sword strike off his own head!" growled Shallum.

"But why should he attack Tyre, in Phœnicia?" asked the timid peasant, hoping to quiet his own fears.

"Phœnicia doeth much business with Egypt," explained Amittai.

"And more," declared the merchant, "they possess the largest ships on our great sea, and do much business in all lands."

"What rich plunder that would be for the greedy Shalmaneser," said Nemuel. "Perhaps he will pass us by if he taketh great spoil from Phœnicia."

"His merchants could amass great riches if he should capture Tyre," said the blacksmith. "Then would they become surfeited and forget to do evil unto us."

"Yea, but Shalmaneser would snatch the

wealth from them, the robber," hissed Shallum again.

"Great indeed are those ships of Phœnicia which come to our Joppa to the south of us," explained Shelah. "It is no wonder that such vessels cause the nation to be lifted up with pride."

"And they sail far to the west. I am well aware for I have seen them loading tin from the mines which was to be shipped even unto Tarshish, in Spain," continued Amittai.

The speeches of Nahash and the merchant cast a cloud of uncertainty over the minds of the group as to the immediate prospects of war for Israel. Yet no one thought for a moment that preparation was unnecessary. While each was busy with his own thoughts, footsteps were suddenly heard on the stone stairs leading to the roof. All eyes turned to see if perchance the comer might be one to bring fresh news. At the sight of his face, they instinctively arose, for it was Nathan, the leading man of the village, who was supposed to be in Samaria on official business. His drawn face awakened afresh the fears of the company.

"Hast thou any word for us?" cried the blacksmith.

"Is the enemy of Jehovah going to stain this fair land with blood?" asked Shallum.

"I know no more than thou," replied Nathan.

"I have just returned from Samaria. The city and the whole country are full of excitement. Conflicting reports are heard from every hill-top."

"Didst thou see Elisha?" asked Amittai.

"Yea," replied Nathan. "Having a little time to myself before nightfall, I called on the aged seer, hoping to get some reliable information to bring thee."

"Had he nothing to tell thee?" inquired Shallum impatiently.

"Nothing beyond the rumour which thou hast heard already. It came early in the day from Ramoth Gilead beyond Jordan."

"Shall we have no word, then?" demanded Shallum, noticeably disappointed.

"You may know for a certainty that our king will not sleep at such a time as this," said Amittai.

"Thou hast well spoken," continued Nathan. "The king hath sent out his swiftest horsemen, and we shall have more certain word on the morrow."

Amittai exclaimed, "Whether it comes or no, I believe Elisha will yet be able to tell us if we shall fall into the hands of Assyria. He hath often saved Israel by his prophecies."

"That he hath," said Nemuel, "and surely God will not leave His people without a warning."

Bariah, fearing the men of Gath-hepher would become at ease, exclaimed, "Let not Shalmaneser find us asleep like bats in winter!"

"Nor like dumb dogs that cannot bark," added Shallum to arouse excitement.

"Let us organize for defense," said a valiant young man.

"Aye, aye!" cried the group. "Amittai shall choose the leaders!"

"As thou desirest," said Amittai, springing upon the battlement of the roof. "Bariah shall gather weapons and put on them a tempered edge. Nathan shall enlist able-bodied men for war, and Shelah shall keep us informed as to our danger."

Leaping upon the wall, Bariah ordered every one to bring his weapons by sunrise. The others said they would make their headquarters at Shelah's shop. Amidst the babel of voices Amittai shouted: "Shelah says he will post all reports at the city gate."

The prospects for war aroused their patriotism afresh.

"May Israel live forever!" exclaimed Shallum.

"And Assyria die like the Amalekites," echoed Bariah.

"Aye, aye!" shouted the crowd, growing wild with enthusiasm.

"Forget not thy weapons," called Bariah. This started the group off for the search.

Few men in Gath-hepher slept that night. There were loving hearts and homes to be protected ; there was a nation to be avenged and a country to be delivered. Only he could sleep who had no love of home or native land.

Jonah spent a feverish night. The excitement of the day clung to him, and drove sleep from his eyes. Never before had he been in a council of war. Never had he seen men's faces white with rage. Never had he known the deep, dark treachery of Assyria. "Curses be on Assyria," he caught himself saying in the dark. Sometimes his heart stood still with terror as he heard the leaves rustle against the window, sounding like footsteps outside. The darkness grew so black that ghastly outlines formed in every corner, and made him tremble. A sudden gust brought the roar of a hungry lion from the nearest hill.

Springing from his pallet on the earthen floor, he cried out in terror, "Father !"

Instantly his father stood by his side. "What fearest thou, my son ?"

"The air seems filled with cruel beings like the Assyrians," whispered the trembling boy.

"Thou needest not fear, my dove."

"But it is so dark, father."

"I will bring a light," said the father, and in a moment he placed by the boy's side an earthen dish of olive oil from which burned a tiny wick.

"I thank thee, dear father. I shall not fear now."

"Dost thou remember the promise in the shining case on the door, my boy?"

"Yea, father, but I could only think of the meeting on the housetop."

Having quieted Jonah's fears with a few loving words, Amittai went back to his work of preparing the weapons for Bariah.

Jonah watched the tiny spark of light burn in the oil, but his thoughts were about Assyria. "Why must Israel suffer at the hands of these heathen people?" he asked himself. "Why cannot the men ask Jehovah to come and save us, for they possess His promise in the shining case? If He saves homes He could save the country." Reasoning thus, he continued: "Why could not Elisha pray for our deliverance? Perhaps he is too old and feeble now. What if he should die? Would the land be without the voice of God? He is surely alone, for the men on the roof spake of no other. Israel all alone on earth without the voice of God!" said he again to himself, and his young heart grew sick and lonesome. Those awful words, "No prophet in Israel!" seemed to echo in his heart.

Turning over and over in his mind the thoughts, now of Elisha, now of Assyria, Jonah finally grew weary with thinking and sleep came

to his relief. As a result of that tragic day two seeds lodged in his heart that were destined to bear fruit long years hence—one of love towards Israel, the other of bitter hatred towards Assyria, the cruel enemy of his race.



V. Wars and Rumours of Wars

B



Y daylight, Gath-hepher was all astir. Men came from every direction bringing swords, spears and axes for Bariah to mend and sharpen. The sight of the old weapons recalled thrilling memories of many a bitter struggle against the Canaanites, the Philistines and the Syrians, which had been waged over those old hills with only these crude implements for defense. Many of them had been in the families for generations, having been handed down from fathers to sons as heirlooms. Tragic stories of close hand to hand fighting and of valiant deeds of heroism clung to many of the weapons so closely that to the owners the old blades seemed to know their own histories. It even seemed possible for them to impart the skill of former days to whoever might be fortunate enough to possess them now.

It was a wretched pile of war implements that lay on the earthen floor of Bariah's shop that morning; yet, insignificant as they were, back of each was the might of a strong arm and the courage of a noble heart.

Among the last of the villagers to arrive was Shallum. "Put the edge of a razor on this, Bariah," he said, as he handed the blacksmith his trusty old sword.

"That I will!" heartily responded Bariah. "I'll cause it to be so sharp that one blow from thy strong arm will fell the mightiest of the foe."

"I will do my part," exclaimed Shallum with a thrill of earnestness that showed he evidently wished the battle was already on and he in the thickest of the fight.

"Hath the night brought any fresh report?" he asked of Amittai, who was standing by.

"No word hath come since yesterday," responded Amittai.

All day long the men of the village gathered in groups and talked of the prospects for war. Brave women, concealing the fear that they might be left widows, encouraged their husbands to be loyal in defense of their God-given land. Even the children caught the spirit and played war, going about the unfrequented parts of the town and dashing upon imaginary Assyrians supposed to be lurking there.

"From whence will they come?" asked Nemuel, his face pale with fear.

"They will march towards Samaria if they wish to conquer our country and cause us to pay tribute as a nation," explained Amittai. "If this be their aim they will cross the Jordan below the sea of Gennesaret and come up the valley of Jezreel."

"Then shall we escape!" exclaimed Nemuel.

"Yea, but they may be coming for slaves or plunder, or their army may be out of food after their long march over the desert region. They will then fall upon our villages and consume us at a stroke," continued Amittai.

"They will never capture me for a slave!" cried Shallum, "and they will pay a costly price before they get my life."

"Oh, father," said little Jonah, clinging to his hand and trembling all over, "thou mightest be killed! What then would befall mother and me?"

Amittai could scarcely restrain his tears. It was the one thought that had been crushing his heart since the terrible news arrived. "Be not afraid, my son," he said tenderly, patting Jonah on the head; "Jehovah will care for us all."

The day of suspense wore away without relief until late in the afternoon, when a man passed through Gath-hepher from Galilee. He brought the welcome tidings that a messenger had ar-

rived there with the report: "Shalmaneser's army has turned northward and is bound for Damascus."

This report was immediately posted at the city gate and a throng quickly gathered, eagerly reading the news.

"I told thee so!" exclaimed Nahash with unconcealed pride as he read the notice. "The evil report was only to make us afraid."

"Yea, but Shalmaneser may attack us next," argued Nemuel, who had about decided to move to Philistia, or Egypt, until the danger of war was over.

"Behold, a horseman cometh!" called the watchman from the tower at the gate.

All eyes turned towards the south.

"It is the king's messenger," he announced.

"'Tis well," exclaimed Nemuel; "now shall we know all about the matter."

"He bringeth no bad news," said the watchman, "for he cometh slowly."

"Perhaps his beast is exhausted," replied Nemuel gloomily. "He hath come from afar."

Shallum laughed. "Think not, Nemuel, that the messenger hath ridden this beast from Samaria. Dost thou suppose our king hath only one horse? That would be a poor defense for Israel. The king hath many splendid beasts scattered over the land, and at such times as this the messenger changeth often."

Riding up to the gate the horseman called :
"Is Nathan, the head man of Gath-hepher, here?"

"Thy servant is here," said Nathan, stepping out to receive a sealed envelope from the messenger.

"Will there be war?" Shallum asked anxiously.

"Thou hast there the official report," replied the horseman pointing to the envelope and at the same time turning his horse in the direction of the next town. The villagers hastily gathered around Nathan as he tore off the king's seal and opened the letter.

"What saith the message?" cried Nemuel, trying to force his way nearer Nathan.

"Read it quickly," shouted Shallum.

The throng was silenced by a motion from Amittai, and Nathan read aloud : "To Nathan, the head man of Gath-hepher, greetings. Yesterday we were aroused by the rumour that Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, was coming against Israel with a strong army. Our most excellent king immediately sent his swiftest horsemen across the Jordan to our most eastern garrison. By relays of horses word has been returned with all speed. No war is feared."

A shout went up from the throng.

"Bless Jehovah!" cried Shelah.

"Praise be to Baal!" exclaimed one of the idolaters.

"I told thee so!" shouted Nahash, as though he had saved the country.

"My day's work hath been to no avail," laughed the blacksmith, who had come running up to the gate the moment he heard that a messenger had arrived.

"Be not too sure, Bariah," said Nemuel gloomily. "The enemies of Israel are not yet all embalmed in death. Thou mayest need to sharpen many more weapons before peace hath settled over our land again."

Amittai motioned once more for silence. "Let us give heed to the rest of the message," he urged.

Nathan continued: "Shalmaneser hath had a dispute with the king of Damascus over tribute money and they are going to war. We do not fear his coming upon us this season, though we direct that ye have all weapons put in good repair for our defense. The king sends greetings to the valiant men of Gath-hepher." Signed: Gedaliah, Chief Captain.

The welcome news spread like magic among the villagers. Their happiness knew no bounds. Men embraced each other; women sang and clapped their hands for joy, while the children danced wildly about in their glee. The expectation that within a few days they would all be in the midst of a bloody conflict had been so real that this sudden change made them feel as if the

war was just over. They had gone through the struggle mentally and it seemed now as if their homes and country had been restored to them and they were once more free.

"Come take thine evening meal with us," was the exclamation heard on every side. No one wished to be alone. Each desired to share his good things with others in thanksgiving for deliverance. A great blessing had come to the village, for the people had been face to face with death, and long-standing enmities that had caused bitter jealousies and destroyed the peace of many hearts were for the time forgotten. Confessions and restitutions moved the quiet village as nothing had done for years. Men paid their obligations and women asked forgiveness for their unkind criticisms.

"Jehovah hath visited us," said Amittai. "He hath won the greatest victory of all in causing righteousness to flow down our streets as it hath this night."

"I hope this same spirit prevails over all Israel," exclaimed Shelah. "It may help to put away idolatry."

That night, at family worship, Jonah offered a prayer all his own, thanking Jehovah for the deliverance from Assyria, and for the loving care which He promised in the little shining case on the door.

The report that Shalmaneser had marched

against Damascus proved to be true. He brought his strong army across the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers and over a long stretch of desert that he might satisfy his greedy ambition, and exalt himself in the eyes of the surrounding kingdoms. He was proud of his power to crush all who might oppose him. Having conquered Damascus, he turned northward and subdued a number of small kingdoms, compelling them to enrich him with gifts and to pay large tribute into his national treasury. After thus satisfying his craven thirst, he returned to his own country, leaving behind him a trail of ruined towns, demolished homes, and bereaved, sorrowing families.

Great was the rejoicing in Israel when the assuring word came that Shalmaneser had certainly gone back to Nineveh. The high tension was relaxed, and the nation turned again to its pursuits with cheering confidence that no war need be feared for at least a year, until the season should come again in which kings go out to battle.



VI. A Social On the Housetop



SOME days later, when with calm minds the chief men and neighbours were again gathered on the housetop of Amittai's home, She-lah asked Nathan to tell them more of his visit to Samaria.

"Tell us of Elisha, I pray thee," said Amittai. "He is much beloved among us and we always delight in a word from him."

"Is Elisha the man with no hair on top of his head whom we saw in Samaria?" asked Jonah, causing a ripple of laughter.

"Yea, my son, he is very aged now," replied Amittai as he drew his boy closer to his side.

"Elisha is indeed a father in Israel," said Nathan.

"That he hath been for over fifty years," interposed Amittai.

"When Nathan hath finished, I will tell thee, Jonah, about his early life," promised Elkanah, who had lived in Elisha's native town.

Jonah bowed his thanks to Elkanah, and Nathan continued his story. "I found him in his quiet home reading the sacred roll."

"The Scriptures mean much to him," said Shelah.

"He obeys them, too," added Amittai.

Nathan described how Elisha lived. "His home is adorned very simply and his meals are frugal," he said. "He seems to care nothing for the things that occupy the minds of most of the people of Samaria."

"Hath he still the old mantle of Elijah?" interposed Amittai.

"Yea, indeed," replied Nathan. "It is a most precious treasure to him. He hath placed it over the door of his chamber and declares that every time he looks at it Elijah seems to stand before him."

Amittai asked if his mind was clear.

"Quite so; and although he is an old man, yet he doth not forget thee for he sent thee his blessing."

"Thanks for so good a message," said Amittai.

"And a special message to thy fair son," continued Nathan, "whom he said he well remembered from thy visits to the capital."

"Thanks to thee and to him," said Jonah as he bowed his head in respect to his superiors.

"Elisha asked me to bear these words to thee, Jonah," continued Nathan: "Israel is slowly

going down, and Jehovah will some day need a strong man to stand in the breach and warn this backsliding people of their doom." Turning to Amittai, he said: "He prays that Jonah may one day be a seer in Israel."

"Well and good," said Amittai reverently. "That has been the constant prayer both of his mother and of myself. May God grant it in His own time."

In the brief pause, Shelah inquired if Elisha had said anything further about conditions in Israel.

For a moment Nathan did not answer. He was looking into the honest face of the youth by Amittai's side, waiting for a response. Jonah had understood the prophet's message and quietly replied, "If it please God."

Replying to Shelah's question, Nathan continued: "Elisha is ageing fast; the sins of Israel and the crimes of our idolatrous kings are breaking his heart. He saith they no longer care for the Word of God."

"Jeroboam hath caused this," insisted Shalum, who well knew Israel's history. "It was he who set up golden calves for worship in Dan and Bethel and kept our forefathers from going to worship God in Zion."

Amittai added, "No wonder that God called him 'The man who made Israel to sin,' for he did great wickedness in the sight of the Lord."

“And he it was who cut off the work of the priests,” said Eliashib, a great-grandson of a priest of Jeroboam’s day.

“I am reminded of Elisha’s stirring words concerning this,” said Nathan. “‘It is true,’ he said, ‘that God hath given prophets unto Israel in place of the lost priests, but with a sacrifice forgotten, a covenant broken and a law ignored, what can a prophet do save to utter a note of warning that God’s judgment must certainly fall upon such a people?’”

Touched by this solemn message from their long honoured prophet, Amittai proposed, for the sake of the young men present, that Elkanah should now tell them of Elisha’s life in his early home.

Elkanah was a man of slender build and sharp features, who had recently come from Abel Meholah. He was at this time approaching middle life, was well to do and highly respected in the community. Because of the intense heat of the Jordan valley during the entire year he was compelled to seek a higher altitude, and he had selected Gath-hepher as his home because it was so pleasantly situated among the foot-hills of the Lebanon mountains. Moving nearer the centre of the group, Elkanah began his story.

“Yea,” said he, “Elisha was born at Abel Meholah, and my father knew him well; that was nearly threescore years ago.”

"So long! Truly our days fly like a weaver's shuttle," said Amittai, as he looked lovingly at Jonah, wondering what the next threescore years would bring to him.

"Did not Elisha possess much riches?" asked the merchant.

"Not Elisha, but his father did, that is for a man of those times," replied Elkanah.

"What caused Elisha to leave home?" inquired one of the young men to whom wealth greatly appealed and who was not acquainted with Elisha's history.

"He became a prophet," explained Amittai.

Nemuel was touched a little by the thought of the young man leaving home and asked, "Were his parents willing?" He was thinking of his own son whom he fondly hoped would remain with him and inherit his property.

"Yea, they were quite willing, so my father hath said," replied Elkanah, "but his neighbours with mocking tongue asked, 'What doth a boy from the plow know about the prophet's calling?'"

"Why troubled they themselves concerning the matter?" demanded Shallum.

"He was their neighbour. They said their sons should not exchange a good farm for a prophet's crust. They thought his head was turned."

"What dost thou mean when thou sayest 'his

head was turned'?" asked Jonah, who was closely following the story of the youth.

"Elisha felt the call of God," replied Elkanah, smiling upon his youthful questioner, "but the neighbours thought it was only the influence of Elijah that caused him to go."

"Yea, I remember!" interrupted Jonah, looking up into his father's face. "Father, didst thou not tell me that Elijah threw his cloak on Elisha and bade him to come with him?"

"Yea, my son. I rejoice that thou hast remembered it so well."

"Is that the cloak thou sawest in his room, Elkanah?" inquired Nemuel.

"Yea, friend Nemuel. It is a great comfort to Elisha."

"I shall surely see it when I go to Samaria on the third day of the week. But do thou tell us about those neighbours of Elisha. It hath been told me that the sons of such people bring no honour to themselves."

Elkanah was silent for a moment as if he were tracing their history. "Thou art right, Nemuel. The parents' indifference caused the sons to become careless."

"Where are the sons now?" Nemuel urged further.

Elkanah's face grew more solemn as he thought of the playmates of his youth. "Some of them went to Samaria," he replied, sadly.

"They found it an easy thing there to forsake Jehovah and drift away into idolatry."

"A thousand pities!" exclaimed the fisherman.

"That is one of the results of a poor example at home," said Amittai.

"Yea, and parents generally pay for such neglect," mused Shelah, thinking of his own home.

With a sudden impulse, Nathan exclaimed: "Were it not for Elisha this country would be wholly given over to idolatry."

"True, Nathan," said Eliashib. "For a long time I abode in Bethel where the heathen altar stands, and I know whereof I speak."

"Hast thou worshiped there?" demanded Shallum.

"Never!" exclaimed Eliashib with marked indignation. "I would have thee know that my great-grandfather was a priest under Solomon. He saw the kingdom of the Hebrews divided and strongly opposed Jeroboam when he set up the golden calf. My fathers and I have ever been true to God in Israel."

"Do thou pardon me, Eliashib," said Shallum in a low tone. "I spake unadvisedly with my lips."

To prevent any ill feeling Amittai quickly remarked: "We are all indebted to Elisha for his faith and miracles."

"And for his prophecies," added Shelah.

"Father," said Jonah, looking up into Amittai's face, "when wilt thou take me to see him again?"

"I know not now, my son. Some day thou shalt go and live with him for a time, that thou mayest learn more of the Scriptures."

Jonah's face lighted up at the bright prospect of being with one so highly honoured by his father and neighbours.

As the hour was now late the group began to scatter to their homes.

"Friend Amittai," said Nemuel, "I shall not be able to enjoy these gatherings again for some weeks. My fields of grain are ripening and I must see to the harvesting and the threshing."

"It is just so with us all," responded several of the group. "But we will visit thee again after grain-gathering."

"I trust you may," replied Amittai heartily. "You are always welcome." The group separated with glad salaams and many expressions of appreciation to Amittai for his hospitality. But all that night the vision of Nathan's earnest face came up before Jonah, and his words burned into his very soul: "Elisha is praying that Jonah may be a prophet. Jehovah will one day need a strong man to stand for Him in Israel." For a moment all thoughts of Assyria vanished. One thing possessed him: was he marked of God to be a prophet?

The next few weeks were very busy ones around Gath-hepher. Every one who could work was pressed into service to save the ripening grain. Men, women and children flocked to the fields in the early morning and remained until dark. Those whose fields were quite distant from the village built simple booths and remained there for several days at a time.

These booths were only for protection against the strong rays of the sun by day and the moon by night. Protection against rain was not necessary because it never rained during the harvest months.

As soon as the grain had been cut and bound the sheaves were loaded upon donkeys and carried to the threshing floors, usually in or near the town. There they were spread on a large level rock, or a piece of hard smooth ground, and two or three cattle, or other animals, were driven around over them for several days until the grain was entirely separated from the straw. The grain, having been gathered up and winnowed, was finally stored in the homes of the owners to be used for food until the reaping time should again come round.



VII. The Mighty Ships of Tyre



OW fast thy son doth grow !" said Shelah's wife to Miriam, when one day Jonah had accompanied his mother to the neighbour's house.

"Yea, he is almost as tall as I," said Miriam, stepping to his side and comparing their heights with manifest pleasure.

Shelah, entering the room at that moment, greeted them warmly. "I should think thou wouldst be proud of such a fine, manly boy," he said. Then turning to Jonah he asked, "What doest thou these days, my son?"

"I do my father's bidding when he hath need of me. Sometimes I help mother in the house or about the court."

"Dost thou ever go away from the village to visit, or for pleasure?" continued Shelah as he seated himself.

"That I have," said Jonah. "Yesterday father suffered me

to go to the sea of Gennesaret with Shallum."

"Didst thou enjoy it?"

"One doth always enjoy a day with Shallum," replied Jonah. "I learned how he catches fish. Few men possess his skill."

Miriam turned from her conversation with Shelah's wife and said: "Yea, friend Shelah, Jonah brought us a fish more than a cubit in length. Shallum hath been very kind to our son."

"That fish was good to the taste," exclaimed Jonah, "the best I ever ate. I desire to go yet again so soon as father will allow me."

"Is that the only place to which thou goest?" asked Shelah.

"Nay, indeed. I have been hunting also and it pleaseth me as much as fishing," replied Jonah with enthusiasm.

"With whom didst thou go?" asked Shelah.

"With Bariah the blacksmith and his sons. I have been with them often. We snare coney and quail and sometimes see a gazelle. Bariah thinks he will yet get near enough to a gazelle to shoot one with his bow and arrow."

"Wilt thou go with me to Tyre, in Phœnicia, some day?" asked Shelah. "Thou wilt see some wonderful things there."

"Oh, yes!" exclaimed Jonah. "Ask father

for me on the morrow. He will let me go if thou wilt ask."

"I'll ask thy mother now," replied Shelah. "Pardon me, Miriam, but I desire thy son to go with me to Tyre some day. It will delight him to see the large city and the great ships which go and come from Tarshish."

"Let it please thee, mother. Think how much it will profit me," interceded Jonah.

"And I will care for him as for mine own son," promised Shelah.

"'Tis well, if his father doth consent," said Miriam, "but we are to send him to school soon."

Shelah's wife remarked that it was sad that they had no good school in Gath-hepher. "I will never send another son away," she declared with marked emotion.

"Thy sorrow is heavy to bear," said Miriam tenderly. They were both thinking of Shelah's eldest son who had gone to school at Bethel and there became an idolater. Since his return to Gath-hepher he had gradually grown more and more worthless, causing his parents much sorrow. His sad downfall had been a warning to all the parents of the village.

"Where wilt thou send Jonah?" asked Shelah.

"To Elisha, at Samaria," replied Miriam.

"Praise be to God!" exclaimed Shelah.

"Thou couldst not find a better place. Surely," he thought to himself, "Elisha's prayer for Jonah will yet be answered."

On the morrow he arranged with Amittai for Jonah to accompany him to Tyre the first day of the following week.

Jonah could scarcely wait for the time to come. A long cherished hope was to be realized. He had often heard his father speak of the great Western Sea and the huge ships that sailed thereon, and now he was to see it all for himself! "Think of so much water that you cannot see beyond it!" he mused, as he lay on his mat that night. "And of waves that would go right over our house! I should think sailors would be filled with fear." Thus his mind dwelt on the sea and ships, and ships and the sea until he fell asleep. On the Sabbath morning following he exclaimed:

"Mother, I dreamed of a great ship in a storm last night. It disturbed my sleep."

"Thou must try and think of other things to-day, my son," said his father reprovingly.

"But it will not leave me," he replied. Nor could he forget it through the day, for cities and ships crowded out the thoughts of Psalms and commandments.

Bright and early the next morning Jonah was up, ready for the long journey. He selected bedding for the night and a warm cloak for the chilly evening. He put grain for the donkey in

a sack, dividing it evenly in the two ends so that it would lie well across the animal's back and make an easy seat for himself. He had often ridden this family beast on short journeys to other villages among the hills of Zebulun, but never had he gone so far away as the great city of Tyre. One reason it seemed so far was because Tyre was not a city of the Hebrews, but belonged to the Phœnicians. He felt he was making a wonderful journey to a foreign country.

After breakfast and worship, Jonah adjusted the bag of grain, proudly mounted the donkey and sat, ready for the start.

"Take heed that thou ride slowly, my son," admonished the father. "These little beasts can go a long distance when wisely ridden, but they cannot be hurried."

"Remember thy prayers at night," said Miriam, smiling a sweet "good-bye."

Jonah met Shelah at the city gate and off they went towards Tyre. For some distance the boy's interested questions were a source of entertainment to Shelah; but as the novelty of the ride over the hills wore away Jonah grew very tired and at Shelah's suggestion was glad to dismount for rest and refreshment during the heat of the day. Tying their beasts with ropes that they might brouse on the grass, they ate their lunch and then stretched themselves in the shade of a friendly tree to rest. After an hour's sleep Shelah

awakened Jonah with: "Come, Jonah, we must be going or we will not reach Tyre by nightfall."

"I am ready," said the lad, jumping up and going for his donkey.

Soon they were mounted again and off for the long ride down the mountain slope to the sea. Near by were a number of hamlets built on the beautiful hills overlooking fertile valleys leading to the sea. They saw the humble peasants busy about their work in shops and fields. Most of them paused from their toil long enough to give a passing glance at the two travellers. Jonah did not know one of all the people he saw and it made him feel that the world was very large and he very small indeed.

It was an hour before sunset when they finally came in sight of the great city of Tyre with its world-famed harbour. A score of huge ships lay at anchor, while smaller ones were moving about in the water. Jonah was spellbound. All that he had heard about the city flashed before his mind. "No wonder that Shalmaneser wanted to capture such a place!" he thought.

"Do they suffer people to go on those ships?" he asked of Shelah.

"I have often been on them with the merchants."

"Thinkest thou that I might go on one of them?"

"Yea, when I do," replied Shelah. "But thou

must not leave me, Jonah," he said somewhat sternly. "Thy parents will be grieved if thou dost not obey and thou mayest bring trouble to thyself."

Jonah promised he would do nothing without Shelah's consent, and then, weary with the long journey and unusual excitement, he sought early sleep. But he was not so tired as to forget the evening prayer nor those at home who seemed so far away.

The next morning was clear and beautiful. Although Shelah was up early preparing for a busy day, he allowed his young companion to sleep on, knowing that he was very weary and that the day would be a trying one for his young mind.

"The ships, Jonah, the ships," he called out when ready to start for the market. Jonah was up in an instant and ready for the day.

The laborious methods of dressing practiced in Western lands are never found in the Orient, at least not among the common people. They sleep in the clothes they have worn during the day, which explains how men, women and children can freely sleep in the same room. The thick outer garment which is worn in cool weather is used for a covering at night while the bed upon which they lie is a thick, padded quilt. A person usually covers his head completely when sleeping, especially if out in the open air.

The city streets of Tyre, and the shops in the markets with their multitudes of things for sale, all contained a world of interest for Jonah. Throngs of people were there, some selling and some buying, while groups of labourers stood by waiting for some one to hire them for the day. Life in a shipping city by the sea was very different from anything Jonah had seen in any of the inland cities of his native country. But though it was all so interesting yet the pleasure of the day was marred by two men whom he saw quarrelling over the price of some fish.

Business being over, Shelah took Jonah to the merchant who was to show them the ship.

"A goodly boy thou hast with thee, Shelah," said the merchant. "Is he thy son?"

"No," replied Shelah. "He is the son of one of our most worthy citizens. This is the first time he has ever beheld so great a city."

"What name does he bear?" asked the merchant.

"His name is Jonah," replied Shelah.

"A dove indeed," laughed the merchant. "He must be his mother's favourite."

Jonah's sweet face lighted up as he heard his mother kindly spoken of. "I wish mother could be here to-day," he said quietly to Shelah. He felt selfish to see so much while his mother was always obliged to remain at home.

At the water's edge the merchant bade them

be seated in a small boat that would take them out to the great ship. While they were tossing on the waves the huge vessel before them looked like a mountain to the small boy from the land of Zebulun.

"Mount up now," said the merchant, as they reached the ship's side.

"How could they build it so large?" asked Jonah, standing on the deck and gazing at the huge masts.

"It requireth much time," replied the merchant, "but we have many skillful ship-builders here and they work rapidly."

The deck was all confusion. The shipmen were hurrying to and fro with ropes and tackling, preparing to hoist the anchor and set sail; servants were rapidly loading the last shipments of freight; merchants were bidding farewell to the captain and wishing him a safe journey.

"To what lands does this ship go?" asked Jonah of an officer who had taken an interest in him.

"We sail from Joppa to Tarshish, in Spain," said the officer. "Wouldst thou like to go below and see the hold of the ship?"

"That I would," replied Jonah eagerly.

"Then come down this ladder," said the officer.

Hastily asking Shelah for permission, Jonah hurried down after the officer to see the wonders below.

"Here is stored the food for the sailors," said the officer, "and there is where they sleep. This is freight for Sidon and other cities where we stop. Away there in the sides of the ship we place the things for Tarshish, as that is our last port."

"I never saw anything so wonderful," Jonah exclaimed. "I wish I might go with thee."

"Ha! ha!" laughed the officer. "None but a good sailor may travel on these waters. Sudden storms sometimes come which make us nearly lose our lives. One must please the gods or he had better not hazard his life on this sea," added the idolater. At this Jonah began to feel timid and started up the ladder to be with Shelah. The weirdness of his surroundings and the mention of the heathen gods made him fear that something might happen to him, for he had heard that the gods of the heathen do very strange things.

"Hast thou anything like this at Gath-hepher, Jonah?" asked the merchant laughingly as Jonah came near.

"Oh, nay," replied Jonah, thinking the merchant did not know his village. "This vessel could not go through our gate," he explained.

The merchant put a little coin into Jonah's hand giving him a hearty invitation to come back and visit the city again when he might remain several days. They then got back into the small boat and rowed to the shore where

Shelah and Jonah bade the merchant "good-bye" and went to the inn. They spent the afternoon packing Shelah's goods ready for the journey back to Gath-hepher on the morrow.

The next morning they were up and away before daylight, as is the custom of the people of Palestine. Jonah had so many things to think of that he did not mind the ride home. He was very anxious to get back that he might tell of all he had seen in the wonderful city. "Father and mother will be proud to hear me tell about Tyre," he said to himself. "Just think of it, neither of them has ever been here! I wonder if Hobab will be at the gate. Not another boy in our town has seen these things. I feel a foot taller than I did three days ago."

As they approached the gate of Gath-hepher Jonah's heart leaped for joy. There was his father waiting for him.

"Welcome," said Amittai. "Is all well?"

"All is well," responded Shelah. "Thy son is a good traveller. I think he would like to have gone with one of those big ships, he was so interested."

"Perchance I will, too, some day!" exclaimed Jonah with manifest pride.

As they passed through the gate there was Hobab in the usual throng at the entrance. "Wonder if he will let me tell him of the wonderful things I saw in Phœnicia. He would

hasten home and ask his father to let him go the very next day," said Jonah to himself.

Miriam was waiting at the door as Jonah rode into the yard. "How I rejoice to see thee, my son," she said. "God hath brought thee safely back to us."

"I beheld a ship greater than our house," exclaimed Jonah.

"Didst thou go into it?" asked Miriam.

"Yea, mother; an officer took me down into the sides of the ship where they put the things for Tarshish, which is away off in Spain."

"I rejoice that thou hast seen so much. But our meal is ready and thou art hungry. Come and eat and after thou hast been refreshed thou canst tell thy father and me all about thy journey."

"Indeed, I have great hunger, mother, for it has been three days since I have had enough."

Lentil soup, fresh lamb with beans, and barley bread soon satisfied his hunger, for he was eager to tell about all he had seen. Amittai and Miriam listened with pleasure to his interesting experiences and to his vivid description of the famous city of Tyre. They were much pleased that through it all he had shown no desire for anything but an honest life and the worship of the true God.

"Jonah will yet fulfill all our hopes," said Miriam to Amittai as they talked of the lad after he had fallen asleep.



VIII. At the Feet of Elisha



OME little time after Jonah's return from Tyre his mother reminded him of the fact that in a few days he must start for Samaria.

"Is it so soon?" asked Jonah.

"Yea, my son. Thou hast reached the age when Hebrew boys become Sons of the Law; and thy father and I wish thee to have good instruction before thou takest the vow upon thyself."

"Shall I sit at the feet of Elisha?"

"Surely, and there is no man in all Israel his equal."

"I need a new garment before I go, for my robe is torn."

"Yea," said Miriam, "and new shoes for thy feet."

"Shall I take my sacred roll?"

"Thou wilt need that most of all. Then thou wilt require bedding for thy couch and a change of raiment. These thou canst easily carry on thy beast under thee."

When the time arrived, Amittai and Jonah started for Samaria, the boy riding the family beast while his father rode one which Shelah had loaned him for the occasion. With his mother's blessing Jonah was full of cheer. As they approached the gate he saw Hobab and his companions, and, as he might have expected, they began to taunt him.

"Behold Jonah!" Hobab exclaimed. "They seek to make a prophet of him." A round of laughter rose from the group.

"He will be sewing pillows to his elbows and having an easy time," said another.

Hobab, still remembering the day Jonah showed him the letters he had learned, shouted, "Young Jonah thinketh highly of himself!"

"They have made much ado over him and he hath not toiled as we have," said a peasant boy.

Jonah's face flushed under the stinging cries. He tried to reply but the words stuck in his throat. The boys mocked his voice and scorned him until he was glad to get out of their hearing. Even though young, Jonah had a delicate sense of politeness, but his temper sometimes made him talk back. "Surely I should grow better being with Elisha," he said to himself.

The ride to Samaria was a delightful one. For some time after leaving Gath-hepher they rode among the foot-hills of the beautiful Lebanon Mountains, descending lower and lower until

they came out on the broad plain of Esdraelon, the most charming valley in all Northern Palestine. Soon they reached the historic river Kishon where, as Amittai explained, Deborah and Barack had once slain so many Canaanites. A little further on they came to the popular caravan route across Galilee.

"Is this the road by which the merchants from Assyria pass on their way to Egypt?" Jonah asked. Amittai answered that it was, and called his attention to a caravan just then coming from the valley of Jezreel, reminding him that beyond the valley was the ford over the Jordan where caravans had crossed from time immemorial.

Many other interesting and historic sights were seen on their way to the capital, each of which added to the wealth of knowledge in Jonah's mind and increased his love for the Sacred Writings.

The meeting with Elisha was a warm and tender one. The venerable prophet joyfully took Jonah into his heart and home. All fear that he would be lonesome and homesick was at once removed from Amittai's mind.

"I rejoice to see thee again, my son," said Elisha, offering them seats in his quiet little room. "How thou hast grown since last we met! May God's blessing be upon thee as thou comest to study the Sacred Writings."

Amittai remained another day to see how Jonah would fare among strangers, and then, bidding him an affectionate farewell, started back for Gath-hepher. Jonah gathered up his few belongings and arranged his place to sleep in the corner of a room in his teacher's home.

"Hast thou read the Writings much, my son?" Elisha asked.

"I have read them all," said Jonah, "and the third book many times."

"Thou hast done nobly; we shall have good times together."

Day after day as they studied with unflagging zeal Elisha found his soul refreshed, and the study became a great blessing for both.

One day, noticing that Elisha shaded his eyes as he read, Jonah said quickly, "I will read to thee, my father," and taking the scroll from Elisha's hands he read the portions which the prophet desired. This was a great advantage to him, for it gave him much familiarity with the Scriptures and taught him to find passages quickly.

"Thou art a great help to me, my son," said Elisha affectionately.

In this way the boy read the writings of Moses, Joshua, Samuel and David, while Elisha explained the difficult passages in words well adapted to his youthful mind. He thus gained a knowledge of the laws of God and the history

and future of Israel far beyond that of most students of his time.

Elisha's life was a busy one. He was pastor of the whole nation and people came to him for counsel from all parts of the country. He was known, too, throughout the land as the mouth-piece of God to Israel. His long-standing reputation as a teacher of righteousness caused many to love him while others disliked and even feared him. He did not hesitate to give many stirring rebukes to the shameless idol-worshippers. He thundered out his warnings that God would sorely chastise them for such defiant departure from the teachings of Moses, and declared that God designed them to fulfill His great purpose in the world.

But Elisha's life was not all devoted to reproof. Some of his most enjoyable work was teaching in various schools where the choicest young men of the nation gathered for instruction. "Indeed, this is a goodly class of young men that I have here," said he one day, looking over the school with evident pleasure. "That boy," fixing his eye upon Jonah, his favourite pupil, "that boy hath the character of a prophet!"

Under Elisha's teaching Jonah not only grew familiar with the principles of Israel's national life but he absorbed them into his very being. Though but a youth he showed that spirit of national patriotism which Elisha could see would

make him strong to stand for righteousness in Israel and to defend it against the shocking inroads of idolatry and other evils with which it was threatened. Thus the boy was being prepared for the prophetic office.



IX. The Wedding



ONAH spent a pleasant and profitable time in study with Elisha, and returned home greatly developed in manly qualities as well as in knowledge of the Scriptures. He passed the next few years, until he was eighteen, assisting his father in the shop. Among the Hebrews, expertness in a trade was considered a necessary preparation for the welfare of every young man.

"Thou hast reached thine eighteenth year, Jonah," said Amittai one morning at breakfast. Then he hesitated, hardly knowing how to proceed. Miriam understood his embarrassment and came to his rescue. "How strong our boy has grown!" she cried fondly. "He has truly been a great help to us."

"My strength is greater than Hobab's," exclaimed Jonah, "albeit he worketh hard in the field."

"Hast thou tested thy strength with his?" asked Miriam.

"That I did, mother. I lifted a stone easily which he failed to move from the ground; and thou knowest that he is older than I."

Among all the sports and games in Palestine this manner of testing strength was one of the most common. The country in the region of Gath-hepher was very stony, and gave ample opportunity for such amusement.

Amittai sat for some time eating his breakfast in silence though occasionally he moved nervously in his chair. The reason for his uneasiness was clear when a little later he said: "My son, if thou art willing thy mother and I desire to arrange for thy marriage soon."

Miriam's face beamed as she watched Jonah to see how he received the announcement. Now it was Jonah's turn to be embarrassed. A crimson flush crept over his robust countenance, but one who knew him well could have seen that he was not only willing but that he had been thinking of it himself.

According to the custom of the day, the selection of a bride was entirely in the hands of the parents. The young man had but little to say and the girl still less. Love was not supposed to exist until after marriage, so the preliminaries were but a business transaction, carried on ac-

according to the judgment or whim of those having the matter in charge.

Long before Jonah had grown to young manhood Amittai and Miriam had arranged for his espousal to Peninnah, a comely maiden in Gath-hepher. She belonged to an honoured family whom they had known in Taanach, and who had come to live in Gath-hepher. The father's name was Mishal and the maiden was two years younger than Jonah.

Peninnah was not shut in the house like the girls of many of the nations of the East because the religion of the Hebrews had a higher moral standard and also because it was not permeated with senseless superstitions. Like other Hebrew girls she went frequently to the village well with her water-jar gracefully poised upon her head. Thus Jonah was able to see her occasionally, though the etiquette of the times would not permit their mingling together as in Western lands to-day.

As Amittai's proposition met with Jonah's approval, preparations for the wedding began at once. Though no easy task, it was filled with pleasure from beginning to end. It was expensive, because there was much clothing to buy for Jonah and his parents and food for the large company that would surely come.

In lands to-day, where there are no books or papers to interest the people and occupy their

minds, these social occasions are much more emphasized and prolonged than in more civilized countries. There are three events in the lives of the male members of the family which usually call for elaborate celebration—the birth, the marriage and the death. Large sums are lavished on feasts at these times, often plunging the family so deeply into debt that they are never able to wipe out the obligation. Custom has such control over the matter that to omit the celebration would seriously offend one's relatives and acquaintances and be regarded as a lack in that sense of propriety which always goes with a good name. Every one who by any means can consider himself entitled to an invitation to a wedding, and who does not receive one, feels offended to the point of resentment. Such neglect on the part of the host gave rise to the proverb: "He who does not invite me to his wedding will not have me at his funeral." This is a simple way of "getting even," because to have persons shun attendance at a funeral is not only considered a disgrace but also an evil omen. A great incentive for having elaborate feasts comes from the public applause which is sure to accompany them, if they are successful. The family becomes the "talk of the town" for the time, at least, and the guests lavish their praises upon those who have tickled their palates and amused their ears with music and song.

Whatever else may have been the motive, Amittai and Miriam determined to make the occasion a fitting one for people of their standing in Gath-hepher. They desired, also, that Jonah should be given a becoming start in life, one that would make him feel himself to be a man worthy of the highest respect of every person in the place.

The wedding festival began a whole week before the wedding day. Invitations had been sent to friends far and near. When everything was arranged the servants were sent out to notify the guests that the preparation was complete and that they might come without delay.

Amittai's home was an unusually popular place in Gath-hepher during this splendid occasion; Nathan, Shelah, Bariah, Shallum, Elkanah and many other men of the village were there almost every evening. As the guests arrived at the gate leading to the court, perfumed water was sprinkled on their clothing, its fragrance indicating the pleasure of the host in being honoured by their presence. A throng of happy guests sat chatting in the courtyard. On tables before them was a generous supply of meats, fruits and vegetables which the servants passed around on large trays. In the centre sat a musician playing upon a simple stringed instrument and singing extemporaneous songs about the beauty of the bride and the strength and skill of the bride-

groom, adding humorous touches here and there, much to the delight of the company.

During the festival week, Jonah mingled freely with the guests, not dressed in his wedding robes, but clad in every-day attire. Many were the pleasantries at his expense, mingled with hearty congratulations and best wishes.

But Jonah was not the only one in Gath-hepher at whose home festivities were being enjoyed, for the bride also had her share. The women of the village came and made merry at her home as did the men at the home of Jonah. As her clothing and jewels were displayed before the guests, they were lavish in their expressions of praise over the charm of the bride and the beauty of her adornments.

The great moment for Jonah and his bride was at the close of the festival week, when the long-looked-for wedding took place. The room in the bride's home was prettily decorated, after the fashion of the day, with palm leaves and other foliage intertwined with strips of bright-coloured cloth. At one side of the room a canopy was erected, under which the two were to stand during the ceremony. It was built like a palace dome, suggesting that their coronation was to take place.

The marriage ceremony took place at night. The relatives and closest friends assembled and waited for the bridegroom to come. Hours

passed, during which time the expectant company amused themselves as best they might. Suddenly a watcher cried: "He is coming." "He is coming." Instantly every one was on the alert. Tiny lamps were lighted which sparkled like a myriad of fireflies in the darkness. Women began clapping their hands and uttering a peculiar trill of joyous welcome to the approaching bridegroom.

The ceremony which followed was very simple. The two stood together under the canopy dome. Jonah made the simple declaration, "Thou art wedded to me," at the same time handing her a silver coin as a pledge of support. Peninnah accepted the coin, gave her assent to the declaration, and the marriage was sealed. With joyful acclamations the bridegroom and his friends escorted the bride to her future home.

Peninnah had been well brought up and was skilled in all manner of household duties. She could prepare and bake the barley cakes as well as any of the women in the village, while her butter and cheese were equalled by none. In needlework, too, she was very skillful and her dainty patterns were copied by many of her neighbours and acquaintances.

From the first, they determined that their home should be a place of prayer and never did a day go by without the family worship which both had been taught to observe in their childhood.

No home in Gath-hepher was happier and to none did the people of the village feel a more hearty welcome.

The Hebrews had some peculiar customs relating to the privileges of husband and wife during the first year of their married life. These customs showed the value they placed upon the institution of the family. It was God who taught them to place the welfare of the home above that of the state, as He strikingly commanded (Deut. xxiv. 5): "When a man hath taken a new wife, he shall not go out to war, neither shall he be charged with any business: but he shall be free at home one year and shall cheer up his wife which he hath taken."

Many happy years of Jonah's life were passed in his pleasant home in Gath-hepher before he was called out into the prophetic ministry to which he afterwards devoted his life. But though his call came to him suddenly it found him ready and willing.



X. In the School of the Prophets



AD news reached Geth-hepher one evening by special messenger. The message was addressed to Jonah in a familiar hand-writing which caused him to open it with nervous haste, while his wife waited anxiously.

"I have long feared it would come," said Jonah, as he opened the scroll. It almost fell from his hands when he read: "Elisha is sick unto death, and calls for thee to come with all haste."

"Why did he delay so long to send me word?" sighed Jonah. "Shall I never see him again?"

"Perhaps this sickness came upon him suddenly," his wife remarked.

"No man in Israel hath done so much for me," said Jonah, the tears falling down his cheeks.

"Thou must start for Samaria early on the morrow," she urged, "for thou mayest yet see him alive."

"May Jehovah be pleased to grant me this great blessing," he replied. "Elisha will be sorely missed in Israel, should he now fall on sleep. How courageous he hath been! Never the tool of man, he has lived for God alone. There have been few such men in our land."

"Thou art such an one," said his wife lovingly.

"Far from it! There never has been one like him in later times."

"Who will take his place?" inquired Peninnah.

"I know not," replied Jonah slowly. "He may desire to see me for some such purpose. He hath often spoken of it, and I have long felt that I was called to such a work."

"May Jehovah honour thee as He hath Elisha," said Peninnah as Jonah parted from her and started for Samaria.

He found the aged prophet still living, though very feeble.

"Thanks be to Jehovah that mine eyes behold thee once again," whispered Elisha slowly.

"God hath been gracious to us both in this," replied Jonah affectionately grasping the prophet's trembling hands in his.

"I called for thee," said Elisha, "that I might lay mine hands upon thee, and set thee apart for the prophet's work."

"It is too great an honour, my father," answered Jonah. "I am not worthy to take thy place."

"Jehovah hath need of thee for He hath much trouble with His people Israel. Thou must pledge thy life to Him and them and do all in thy power to save them from the bondage which will surely come if they continue to forsake His way." After a moment's pause Elisha added: "Thou must take the schools I leave. Teach the young men of God and of what He wishes them to do. Beware of false teachings. They please the mind only and leave the heart as far from God as was Achan's. Do so, my son, and may His good Spirit who hath guided me be with thee all thy days."

Elisha passed away peacefully and was laid to rest by the loving hands of those who had for many years enjoyed his ministry. Jonah returned to Gath-hepher for a brief time and then took up the work Elisha had entrusted to him in the School of the Prophets, a place where young men met for fellowship and the study of the Scriptures during certain months of the year.

Idolatry had done much damage to the faith of the Israelites. Young men frequently asserted that they cared not for Moses' narrow views.

"Why study these old writings?" asked a

student one day. "Are not the thoughts of men to-day as good as these?"

"Where hast thou promises such as these?" said Jonah. "Thou mayst speak fine thoughts but will they stay the soul in trouble or drive back armies as God hath done? High-sounding words do not give strength when men face mortal foes or grapple with the unseen hosts of death and hell. Men have need of God. Then why cast away the words which He hath written? Wouldst thou go to Him with words of thine own and tell Him they are as good as His?"

"But did Jehovah give all His thoughts to Moses? Have not other men received some gifts from God for writing?"

"If thou canst write like God, begin at once: go, make thy promises to Israel that she shall ne'er be lost, and that Messiah soon will come and save us all. If thou canst not do this it is not for thee to tear apart in mental sport that which God hath written, nor is it just that thou shouldst make men feel Jehovah hath deceived them."

"But God gave us our reason," insisted the young man. "Of what use is it to us if we have not the right with it to choose our way?"

"God could not give thee wisdom equal to His own, for He is infinite. He gave thee thy reason that thou mightest follow Him and in

some measure understand His way and know the beauty of His thoughts. But thou hast missed His purpose and hast abused thy reason by persuading men that God is altogether wrong and thou art right. God's priceless gift to thee thou hast distorted into a tool for the destruction of thy soul."

"But have men no right to think? What are fine minds for? Must we be like stupid parrots that never utter anything beyond the words they hear?"

"Thou hast missed God's thought again, my son," replied the prophet. "Thou hast cast away His tested plan and hast made instead a basely human one that pleaseth thee. With swelling pride thou hast presented it to men and asked them to accept it instead of the one Jehovah gave. Thou hast demanded credit to the full, as though thou wast omnipotent, and now it offendeth thee to learn that thy plan is full of faults and that it leaveth man in sin."

"How doth it leave man so when the thoughts are good?"

"My son, no human thoughts can pay the debt of sin. Our sins are crimes against the God of love. Wouldst thou offer Him thy feeble thoughts to cancel all thy debt of sin? Thou mockest Him and heapest up thy guilt a thousandfold. Thou shuttest up thine only door of hope."

"I think I see it now," said the young man after a thoughtful pause. "I cannot pay my debt of sin with coins made from sin. Is that thy meaning?"

"Thou speakest truly," said Jonah. "The coin that pays that debt must bear the stamp of Him who is ruler of the realm. Man cannot make such coins for none possesses the metal that will stand the test of judgment and the law."

"I thank thee for all thy help," said the young man earnestly.

"Thy thanks belong to Elisha for it was he who taught me these things," said Jonah. "And he bade me teach them to all who come to study from the Sacred Book."

"I have been foolish," the young man continued. "I have taken poison into my heart and have laid the blame on Jehovah for all my strange delusions. Alas, I shut my eyes to the light of God and in my foolishness I said: 'Tis dark, and I must lighten up my path myself.' But now I see I never could have reached the God I sought."

"I rejoice that thou seest the truth so clearly," said Jonah. "Only God can reveal these things."

"Well do I know it now. I tremble at my sin and unbelief. I proudly lit my little human candle that I might search for Him who is the

Light. I tried to find Him with my mind alone and then to reveal Him to myself. In my foolishness I forgot that perchance God had revealed Himself to me."

"'Tis there that man breaks down," exclaimed the prophet. "Men seem to think that God is hiding and that man doth nobly if he search and call aloud for Him. He thinketh God's good ways too simple for his cultured mind and thrusts his foolish neck into yokes that gall him. He saith, 'Tis true, the yokes may hurt a little now but the progress of evolving such great things is always slow and in a little time we'll have them fitted so they will lift the load and make man whole, without a single scar.' " Seeing the young man was listening closely, Jonah continued: "Elisha used to say that man's first mistake was when he put the weight of sin too low and called it only the weak mistakes of humankind. The second mistake, he said, left man helpless in the dust, for man esteemed his strength to lift that load full equal to the task, and went deceived through life, amid a thousand failures that his blinded eyes ne'er saw until death raised the veil and showed him how narrow had been his vision of the world to come.

"Elisha loved to say: 'We go to be with God who is a million times as great as man's best thoughts can make Him.' How well the great prophet understood Jehovah! He knew God's

thoughts towards Israel and that He had chosen this nation to be the keeper of His oracles. Yea," exclaimed Jonah with a sudden burst of enthusiasm, "Israel is God's selected race of all the world, and I have dedicated my life to guard her from the cruelty and greed of nations that worship idols."

"How blessed is thy memory of Elisha," said the young man. "May God preserve thee to fulfill all that is in thine heart. Thou must tell me more of Elisha at some other time."

"That I will, my son, with joy," said Jonah as they parted.

Jonah spent many profitable days instructing the young men who assembled at the school. It was an inspiration to teach those who would soon be scattered over the nation instructing the young. Occasionally he made a circuit of the schools, which were located at several of the leading centres of the country to be accessible to all those who might desire to attend.

The Jewish religion was the chief feature of the education. Before a youth could be accepted as a "Son of the Law" it was necessary to know the law of Moses and understand the ceremonies connected with the worship of the sanctuary. He had to memorize a number of the Psalms which were chanted in the services. This care that the Hebrews exercised over their children was the power that long preserved the nation

from decay. As soon as they began to neglect this instruction they paved the way for the next generation to become idolaters.

Jonah's life was full of opportunities for service but he found time now and again to visit Peninnah in Gath-hepher for a few days, and he was always sure of a warm welcome from his devoted wife.



XI. The Call to Nineveh



OW I rejoice to be at home again," said Jonah on the evening of the sixth day of the week as he entered the house.

"How I rejoice to see thee, my beloved," replied his wife.

"The ride was long from Gilgal," continued Jonah throwing himself on the couch.

"At what hour didst thou part from Gilgal?"

"Yesterday morning before the break of day."

"How quickly thou hast come!"

"I could not start before the fourth day of the week and it caused me to ride with all speed to reach home before nightfall this day. I was greatly desirous that we might enjoy the Sabbath together."

"Thou art going to abide at home for a while and rest thyself," said his wife pleadingly.

"I must return the first day of the month Nisan," replied Jonah.

"Canst thou not tarry longer?" she urged.

"It behooveth me to be at the Passover."

"Wilt thou then speedily return again?"

"I purpose to abide here during the harvest months of Iyar and Sivan," replied Jonah. Rejoicing at this good news, Peninnah departed to prepare the evening meal.

"The rest is good," sighed Jonah, thinking of his tedious journey. "How blessed it is to have a quiet Sabbath at home."

"Our evening meal is made ready," called his wife.

Jonah sprang up with a start. "I have been asleep. How weary I am. Would that we might have other ways of travel than by those creeping mules."

"Thou must be tired,—but the food will refresh thee," said Peninnah cheerfully.

"And I will return to sleep at once, after that we have eaten."

"Thine aged friend, Nathan, said he would pay thee a visit on the morrow. I told him thou wouldst probably be at home to-day."

"May I then feel better than I do this night," said Jonah somewhat sadly.

He arose the next morning much refreshed and spent a delightful day with his family. The afternoon brought a call from Nathan and Shelah, both of whom were well advanced in years.

"Greetings, my fathers," exclaimed Jonah, as he met them at the door. "Ye are thrice welcome!"

"Blessings on thee, Jonah. How hast thou fared?" replied Shelah.

"My long ride from Gilgal tired me much, but I am now rested."

"Hast thou a school there?" asked Nathan.

"Yea, but few young men come now," replied Jonah.

"What aileth them?" inquired Shelah.

"The idolatry begun by Jeroboam, after the days of Solomon, hath greatly weakened the faith of many. The young men desire some new oracles in these days; they think Moses too old."

"Dost thou then believe that Israel is departing from the faith of our fathers?" asked Nathan. "Hast thou observed much change since thou hast been in Gilgal?"

"Israel is growing more corrupt, 'tis true," replied Jonah, "but I hope that God will yet save her. Our only hope is that Jehovah's arm will soon be made bare."

"What thinkest thou that He will do to deliver us?"

"Israel doth need a king who will overthrow this idolatry and drive the false priests and prophets from the land."

"We need another Elijah to slay them," said Shelah.

"Nay, nay!" replied Jonah, as if he felt the remark to be a reflection on himself. "Killing a few prophets doth not suffice. Elijah slew the prophets of Baal as a solemn warning and as a testimony that Jehovah still lives. He doth not require each of us to go about killing false prophets. Father Nathan, thou knowest why Israel hath forsaken Jehovah and hath turned to idols. Syria was Jehovah's rod to punish us, and ——"

"Will He punish us again?" asked Nathan anxiously.

"I can only hope for the best," replied Jonah thoughtfully. "'Tis strange that the chosen seed of Abraham must be scourged by a heathen tyrant."

"Dost thou think Assyria may come against us as Jehovah's judgment?" asked Shelah.

"God forbid," exclaimed Jonah. "We will fight them to the end, if they do. Assyria hath no claim on Israel,—no more than Satan hath."

Shelah declared that there was but little to fear. "Assyria is growing weaker and weaker every year," said he.

"True," replied Jonah, "it is caused by their false worship. The rulers daily drink themselves to intoxication at their religious feasts."

"They are not fit to rule!" insisted Shelah. "If Israel could but gain full power over them their wicked ways would soon be changed."

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"But," said Jonah raising his finger, "let a new king arise who will do away with their idolatry and Assyria will put on the strength of youth. Then will all the nations suffer."

"We shall always have them to fear," insisted Nathan.

"For Israel's sake I could see them crushed forever," exclaimed Jonah, bringing his foot down on the earthen floor. "I fear they will one day do us injury."

As Shelah arose to go, he said: "Why need we be afraid? Jehovah hath given us the land and we should not fear though the mountains be cast into the sea."

"Thou hast spoken the very truth, Nathan, yet we loathe to have these heathen nations plunder us."

"Blessings on thee alway, Jonah," said the old men as they left the house.

"And on ye both," replied their host.

Jonah went back to his chair and for a long time pondered alone. He thought of all that the aged villagers had said about the danger of Israel's forsaking God and of His punishing her to bring her back.

"I cannot bear to think that we must ever be slaves as were our fathers in Egypt. Surely God will not permit a heathen people to conquer us again."

That night, the family having retired early,

Jonah thought he would take advantage of the quietness for a little time of reading and prayer. He read a long, long time until his heart was full and aflame with zeal for Israel. Then he knelt for prayer. The chosen people of Jehovah were the burden of his thoughts. A mysterious Presence filled the room, rich with love and pity. A strange fear possessed him such as he had never felt before. "It must be Jehovah," he thought.

"What wilt Thou have me to do?" he prayed humbly.

The call came, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before Me."

The words shot through his mind with strange effect. They lingered and burned deeper and deeper.

"They came from God," he said. "What can they mean?"

"Arise, go to Nineveh." "Nineveh!" he repeated to himself.

"Never," he exclaimed, springing to his feet. "That cannot be from God. Israel is His chosen seed. Why seeketh He to warn Assyria? Will He cast away His own and take such brutish idolaters to be His people? My mind hath deceived me."

But deeper and deeper grew the conviction of Jehovah's call for Nineveh. The more he tried

to prove himself mistaken the more God fastened the call upon his mind.

"I wish I were in Gilgal—not here," he said.

Long did the prophet walk the floor that night trying to convince himself that God had not spoken; but God was with him and fastened still more firmly in his mind the argument he was vainly striving to pluck out.

"Arise, go to Nineveh—and cry against it." "Cry against it," he repeated. "That I have always done. I might do that well enough," laughed he, "could I choose my words, but that is not the message. How I wish it were—I'd go and curse them to the end. But I know the purpose of the message and the mind of Him who spake it. This room was filled with mercy,—not with judgment. Doth not my prophet's instinct tell me why? God means to be forgiving,—and so could I be, to all but them. I will cast this thought from me with sleep," he said throwing himself again on the couch.

For a long time sleep evaded him. He rolled and tossed in feverish distress. "Would that I had never been born," he cried, as his mind struggled for relief. "Would that I had never been so pleased to be a prophet, if it meaneth this."

Again the awful words came, "Arise, go to Nineveh."

"That means Assyria,—Israel's enemy," ex-

claimed he in bitterness of soul. "Assyria hath been a tyrant and a robber to us and all our neighbour nations. It hath never done one good thing for any people living. Never will I go," he cried as he sprang from the couch and walked the floor again. "From my youth I've hated it with righteous hatred, and loved God's people, Israel, and now—no, this call is not from God; it cannot be; would He preserve a nation that hath been nothing but a curse, and let His own beloved people be their prey?

"God hath not spoken," he said emphatically, "and yet I fear He hath. That voice was only His," he reasoned.

"But may it not be Satan who hath tricked me? He knows I stand for God and Israel, and he fain would lead me where idolaters could make a mock of me and end my life in shame. And what would Israel say then,—Israel whom I have always loved? What would Shelah and Nathan say, and the prophet's sons at Samaria,—and the king? Oh, see them scoff and slander me. All my labours for Israel would be lost, and more, my people would never speak to me again. If they but heard the words: 'Arise, go to Nineveh,' they would all be wroth. 'What?' the king would say: 'Jonah going to save a nation from judgment on its sins when it has been a curse to us for generations?'

"And then my family—these children and my

lonely wife. If I should die, my family would perish and my name would be dishonoured to the end of time. Think of it! Leave home and kindred and the land I love to carry a warning to a people that may slay us all and take our land? Never," cried he again, with a set face which showed that the battle was almost over and his mind was made up.

Tossing wearily upon the couch, he groaned: "I cannot drink this bitter cup. 'Tis more than I can bear. I will not go."

This last decision changed his heart and home. A pall of darkness settled over his soul; the room grew cold and lost the loving Presence that had filled it to the full. He felt the departure of the prophet's power and realized that he was no longer the messenger of God.

"What strange feeling is this?" he asked. "It must be because I am so tired. The morning will find me refreshed."

But Conscience appealed to him while there was a ray of hope, and no sleep came until the approaching dawn.



XII. God's Call Higher than Patriotism



HE sun had risen high when Jonah awoke, worn and haggard. The effects of the terrible battle he had fought during the previous night were plain. He had been sorely defeated in the conflict and furnished a striking example of the truth that he who decides against God decides also against himself.

"Thou wilt be sick, my husband," said his wife. "Thou art so weary from thy work. Are there no other teachers in the school?"

"Not now," he said sharply.

"If thou shouldst die or leave, they could not fill thy place. I am glad thou art so valuable to Israel, but I sometimes grieve that thou art gone so much from me."

"Say no more," said Jonah. "I cannot bear it."

"Thou art troubled," softly spake his wife. "Wilt thou tell me what is on thy heart?"

"I cannot now," said Jonah as he arose to go. He well knew that his haggard appearance was not from overwork in the school but because he was fighting against a clear conviction.

There are thousands still who let their friends think their trouble comes from hard work when they themselves well know it is caused by the inner conflict of the soul. They are battling against the will of God who desires to give them His blessing and have them know His way is best.

Jonah seated himself in a quiet chamber of the house to think again of what seemed like a dream. It all came back fresh and strong.

"Thou canst go yet!" a voice seemed to say.

"I cannot bear this," he cried, and springing to his feet he hastened out to fresher air.

"I'll talk with Nathan of this matter," said he with a sudden impulse. "He knows me and the nation, and has long advised young men in battles keen as this. But he must promise not to tell a word to any one, for these idolaters would tear me in pieces if they knew the call."

As Nathan greeted Jonah at the door of his humble home, he started back and exclaimed: "Why dost thou look so pale and worn? Thou hast changed from yesterday. What aileth thee?"

"Father Nathan," said Jonah, "yesterday I was strong and cheerful."

"That I well remember," replied Nathan.

"To-day I am like a hunted deer, a broken reed."

"Hath death entered thy home?" asked Nathan sadly.

"Worse than death," said Jonah, dropping his head upon his chest.

"Grieve not, my son. Tell me thy trouble and I will give thee aid with all I have. Thou hast been my well-beloved since a boy."

"If I tell thee, thou must covenant not to reveal a single word. My life may pay the price," urged Jonah.

"Thou hast my word of honour," replied Nathan, placing his hand on his thigh.

"Nathan, God spake to me last night, I fear, and said: 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before Me.'"

"Art thou sure it was His call?"

"Not sure," said Jonah, slowly—"and yet I am."

"That sounds like His long-suffering love," said Nathan. "No other God cares aught for men except to make them worse."

"What thinkest thou that I should do?" cried Jonah as he wept in his anguish.

"Would that I could tell thee to the end," replied Nathan, laying his trembling hand on the bowed form kneeling before him.

"If I obey it will cost me my life, or I shall become an outcast. No man will suffer me again in Israel."

"Be not too sure, my son. God gave thee thy life and none may take it till thy work hath been accomplished."

"Father Nathan, wouldst thou have me save that wicked nation? I wish them dead. I feel sure that some day they will capture our land and enslave our people."

"It may not be so. God may have higher plans than thou."

"I cannot go if it mean that Assyria will have my home and thine, and Jehovah be defied."

"Not even if God wills it?" asked Nathan with a searching glance.

"He cannot will that Israel be lost. Am not I a prophet, and have I not studied the Sacred Writings since a child? Elisha, too, taught me about these things, and well do I know that God hath promised us this land until earth shall cease to be."

"But thou art self-willed, Jonah, and hath been since a boy," said Nathan reprovingly.

"I stand true to Israel," exclaimed Jonah.

"Better be true to Jehovah, my son. Can He do nothing except with thine approval?"

"Wouldst thou have Israel a prisoner in chains?" demanded Jonah.

"I would have thee obey God's call, no matter where it leads thee."

"How thou hast changed," exclaimed Jonah. "I well remember, when I was yet a boy, thou spakest hard against that cruel nation. Thou hadst thy sword made sharp and wouldst have slain the wicked king thyself, hadst thou a chance."

"I remember it as well as thou, my son ; that was God's plan then, and we obeyed ; another day hath come and with it God's new plan for thee. Wilt thou obey ?"

"Thou hast grown childish in thine old age," said Jonah as he arose to go.

"Thou wilt bring sadness into thy life, instead of joy. Obey Jehovah, for it is the safest plan," and they parted with a strange feeling of separation which they had never known before.

"I'm sorry I came," said Jonah as he reached the street. "Nathan hath lost his courage and his care for Israel. He is old and doth not think to live for many years. He hath no thought for the generations yet to come."

On passing the city gate, Jonah heard a familiar voice addressing him.

"Peace be to thee, Jonah."

He turned and beheld Elihu, one of his close friends, a teacher in one of the schools in Samaria.

"How camest thou here ?" he asked.

"I am taking my journey to Kedesb and came this way from Samaria to see thee."

"Thou hast come in time to give me good

counsel, for thou art my brother, and I am glad to trust thee with a sore trouble which has come upon me."

"I have but little time to tarry, but it is all thine. I must reach the eastern sea by evening."

"Then will I walk with thee on thy way," said Jonah.

"Thou must indeed be troubled, my brother, for thy countenance is full of sorrow."

"It is more than trouble," replied Jonah.

"The strain is terrible to bear."

"Tell me thy sorrow, and may God help me to bring thee relief."

"Canst thou keep it all as a prophet's secret?" urged Jonah.

"Verily I will," promised Elihu.

"'Twas only last evening that it came to pass. I thought to spend a quiet time in prayer. Suddenly it seemed that a voice spake to me these awful words, 'Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before Me.'"

"How wonderful! What can it mean?" exclaimed Elihu.

"That is what I long to have thee tell me," urged Jonah.

"This is the first I ever knew of such a call."

"I shall not go," said Jonah, stopping in the highway and looking Elihu squarely in the face with decision.

"If it be God's call to thee, thou shouldst," replied Elihu meekly.

"Why should God call me? There are younger men and they are free."

"God knoweth best. He is wise and just. If He has laid this command upon thee then thou art His best choice for the task. He maketh no mistakes."

Jonah stepped a little nearer Elihu, and, placing his hand on his shoulder, said: "My brother, thou art free. Wilt thou not go for me?"

"That I would gladly do for thee in all thou couldst desire, but the call of God permits of no exchange. Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice."

This gentle rebuke from the younger man struck home and yet Jonah would not betray his feelings. "If I should die, or leave the land, then perchance thou wouldst have to go."

"Then would I gladly go."

"And why not now?"

"The call must come from God. I cannot choose my work."

"But thou canst help a brother prophet."

"How can I? The message is to thee."

"I have no message save the words I told thee."

"Ah, my brother, the message is locked up for thee till thou dost go. Jehovah doth not give His prophets words till they are needed.

He will give them fresh to thee when thou comest to the city."

"The way is all so dark," moaned Jonah.

"Jehovah knoweth the way and He will guide thee. Thou art His prophet and it is a prophet's honour not to doubt."

"Why is there not some other way to do this work?"

"We know not why, but God depends on man for these great tasks of His."

"Let Him choose another. I have my work."

"Dost thou refuse God's latest task, then all thy other work is blighted. Jehovah's blessing cometh on obedience,—not simply on the things we wish to do."

"Why calleth He a man against his will?" said Jonah with a gleam of hope.

"Ah, surely, Jonah, thou rememberest thine own speech in the school at Samaria. I well recall thy parting words and how they thrilled us all. 'Young men,' thou saidst, 'have ye accepted the sacrificial lamb by faith? It is for life. If ye have not this faith Jehovah will not deal with thee in mercy.'"

"I recall it and God's blessing with it," interrupted Jonah.

"'Young men,' thou saidst, 'if ye have now received the prophet's call there are two things before you. The will of God must be your first desire and Him alone must ye obey. His choice

must be your highest pleasure and where He leadest ye must not refuse to go.' "

Jonah's face flushed. He remembered it all. For an instant he could not answer. "It is easy to advise others," he thought, "but it is hard to follow the advice when the thorny places come in one's own path."

"What if Assyria rises up against us! Then wouldst thou be sorry that I had gone," said Jonah to drown his confusion. "God may preserve that horde of brutes to kill us all. I stand for the preservation of Israel."

"Lovest thou Israel more than our Jehovah doth? Art thou more interested in us than He?"

"God should punish the Assyrians. They deserve a thousand strokes,—and death."

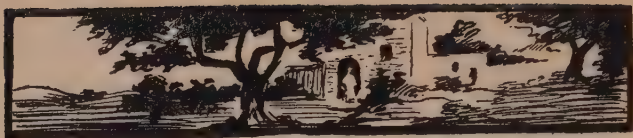
Elihu's heart was stirred. "Is God thy servant now?" he said, "and doth He run at thy command? How hath the servant risen above his Lord?"

"Thou revilest me," said Jonah. "Go thou thy way and I will go mine forever," and he turned away.

"God loveth thee," said Elihu tenderly. "May He save thee from the price of such a step. How wrong-doing doth separate the best of friends," he added to himself.

Jonah returned to his home much downcast. No one seemed to endorse his views, or even to

sympathize with him in his struggle. His home was unbearable because it was the place where he had heard the call, and every time he entered his room the strange message seemed to be repeated. "What shall I do?" he cried out in agony of soul.



XIII. The Call Rejected



WILL see Shallum," said Jonah ; "he feels as I do about Assyria and will understand my trouble, I am sure." He found Shallum at home and alone. The old man had grown feeble, though he was still active for a man of his years. Jonah sat down by his side as he lay resting on his couch.

"Shallum," said Jonah, "my days are filled with sorrow."

"Thou art not ill, I trust."

"I have become possessed with a strange feeling that I am to go to Nineveh and preach against the wickedness of the Assyrians."

"What kind of a dream is this?" inquired Shallum.

"It is so strange that I cannot understand it."

"What is it for? Are those idolaters to be destroyed?"

"I fear not. I believe it is for no other purpose than to prolong the life of the nation."

"Never," exclaimed Shallum,

lifting himself from the couch. "Not after we have taxed our nation and called out our strongest men to protect ourselves from their brutal power and control."

"That is my belief," returned Jonah.

"How absurd!" continued Shallum, his eyes beginning to flash with their old time fire. "Shall we nurse a dying beast that he may one day turn and rend us?"

"How excellent is thy reasoning. Thou art the only man who seems to understand my terrible position."

"Which of all the nations would thank thee? Assyria hath played the serpent towards them all. Egypt, Judah and Syria are all afraid and every one of them would mark thee for its enemy."

"The thing that tortures me most," said Jonah, "is the fear that those Assyrians whom I might deliver would some day devour our families and homes."

"That they would, my son. Such a plan may bring most terrible results and blight our nation for all time to come."

"One should be very careful before lending himself to such an act," said Jonah, feeling a little relief.

"Thou art well able for that," smiled Shallum. "Surely thou takest thy life in thy hands if thou goest to Assyria."

"That is what I have tried to make others un-

derstand but none seem to think it worth considering. If they had to go it might be different. Men are bold when others have the dangerous tasks. I thank thee, Shallum, for thy words, for thou hast helped me," added Jonah as he parted with the old neighbour. "I trust thou mayest yet be spared for many days."

* * * * *

In another part of the village, Nathan sat in his home thinking seriously about Jonah. "I must go to see him," he said. Seizing his staff he hurried to Jonah's home, but the prophet was not there. Supposing that Peninnah knew all about the situation he asked, "Did thy husband decide to go to Assyria?"

"Assyria," exclaimed the astonished woman. "Who told thee such a thing?" Nathan saw his mistake and turned quickly away.

Peninnah called earnestly for an explanation but Nathan feared to be there if Jonah should return, and he hastened on.

Half an hour later when Jonah reached home, he found his wife anxiously waiting for him.

"My husband, thou hast been gone this whole day and I have had much sorrow for thee. Tell me. What burden is it that hath cast thee down?"

Jonah's talk with Shallum had made him more determined to withstand his conviction. He had made up his mind not to go to Nineveh and he

did not care who knew about it. He was trampling upon his conscience by force of will.

"I had a feeling that I might need to go to Assyria to preach against that wicked Nineveh," he said.

"And leave me?" she exclaimed.

"Have no care," said Jonah assuringly.

"What if thou shouldst be killed?" she sobbed.

"Cease thy weeping, my precious wife. I am not going," he said gently. "I will leave the prophet's office first."

"I can suffer thee to fulfill thy calling in Israel, but not to go abroad to another people, especially to Assyria."

"Yea, anywhere but Assyria," exclaimed Jonah.

With these assuring words, Jonah passed into the house and sought rest on the couch, while his wife busied herself preparing the evening meal.

"I am glad he is not going," she said to herself. "I cannot see whence came so strange a feeling that he must go to preach to those heathen people."

But Jonah could not rest. He had spoken boldly in declaring his determination not to go to Nineveh but it did not change his convictions. The call was still there. At the evening meal neither Jonah nor his wife cared for food.

"Thou wilt be ill," said Peninnah. "Canst thou not rid thyself of this strange conviction?"

"Would that I had not come home at this time."

"The delusion will wear away; only be thou patient," assured his wife.

"My mind almost leaves me at times. I am filled with despair."

"Thou wilt forget it all before thou hast returned from the Passover," she said, trying to quiet his fears.

"I have no heart for the Passover."

"Wilt thou then remain at home this time?" she asked cheerfully.

"I cannot remain here if this delusion continues."

"Would that I might help thee!" she said lovingly.

"Nothing can help me. Thou hast always helped in everything but in this thou art powerless. Yet I owe thee much for what I have accomplished in Israel."

"Thy work has always been mine, and it grieves me sorely that I cannot take thy burden now."

"None can take this burden. The strange delusion burns into my very brain."

Two long, gloomy days passed, but for Jonah there was no respite. He had almost reached the limit of endurance. Another night came down upon the earth, spreading still deeper gloom over his soul. Darkness is always harrowing to

minds depressed. In the still watches God and conscience have the wrong-doer at their mercy.

"One more night like the last and I shall be doomed. I must get away. I must go somewhere. This trouble has so upset me that I have lost my care even for the Passover." He thought of all the places far and near that would be safe, and where he might drown the strange conviction. "I cannot go to Damascus for it is too near Nineveh. How would I fare in Egypt? Not well, I fear, at this season of the year."

A new thought came like an inspiration which caused his heart to leap. "I could get a ship to Tarshish!" he exclaimed. "One of those mighty ships I saw in Tyre when I was a boy. How easily I could shake off this burden in such a place!" After hours of thinking over the situation this was the most hopeful plan of any that had come to him.

"I will go to Samaria to-morrow, and if this feeling does not leave me I will, the next day, leave for Joppa where the Phœnician ships come to trade. I will go with one of them for a journey. The voyage will do me good. Somehow I shrink from such a venture,—but it is all there is left for me to do. I'll do it and never falter. 'Tis finished."

Jonah arose before daylight and busied himself with the preparation for his departure.

"There is no rest for me here," he exclaimed

half angrily to his wife. "I shall be away for Samaria in a little while. Wilt thou prepare me a few cakes?"

"When wilt thou return?" she asked eagerly.

"Not soon, unless this burden leaves me."

"Our lives are too much separated," exclaimed his wife, in tears.

"It is not my fault nor thine. It is the prophet's vocation that brings us all this trouble. I will leave it and be free."

"Whence then shall our living come?"

"I care not. I would rather die than get a living at such a price."

"At what price, my loved one?"

"To get my living from Israel while I seek to save an enemy that may curse her. Never!" he exclaimed, pacing the floor. "Thou couldst never face our friends again," said he, turning to his wife who was busy with the cakes. "I should be a betrayer, and as one who sells his children for money. My father would loathe such an act."

Breakfast was soon over and Jonah started at once. "Thou wilt come back soon," pleaded Peninnah as they parted at the gate.

"Not soon, unless my mind doth become transformed about Assyria."



XIV. The Fleeting Prophet



HEN Jonah passed out the gate of the city he encountered Nathan.

"Whither, Jonah?" called Nathan.

"To Samaria."

"Why not ride thy beast?"

"I may not return soon," he replied, hastening on to escape further questioning.

The sun had long since set when Jonah trudged up the hill upon which Samaria was built. He sought Elkanah who, though half a generation his senior, had been his bosom friend since childhood. They had much in common for Elkanah belonged to the line of priests and was a true man of God.

Though Jonah was much worn by the long walk, he was not too weary to talk about the thing that had filled his mind for many days with harassing thoughts. Elkanah soon discovered that his friend was not himself, and

pressed him for the reason. Jonah told the full story, Elkanah listening long and patiently.

"Thou art highly blessed of God," he said thoughtfully as the story was finished.

"How may that be?" asked Jonah impatiently.

"In that thou art sent as a special messenger of Jehovah."

"Thou art mad, Elkanah! No prophet in Israel hath ever been a messenger to a foreign people."

"True indeed, but ——"

Jonah interrupted,— "The oracles of God were entrusted to Israel. Wouldst thou take them from us and give them to Assyria?"

"Is God's mercy so limited? Hath He not enough for all?" interposed Elkanah.

"But," exclaimed Jonah with a gleam of triumph, "let all those, who desire the oracles of Jehovah, come and study with us and take upon themselves the commandments and the rite of circumcision."

"Jonah, give thine ear to this word. The promise was made unto Abraham that through his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. Who knoweth but thou hast been selected to bring this great thing to pass?"

"Not if I am to begin with uncircumcised Assyria!" exclaimed Jonah, much agitated by Elkanah's argument.

"God knows where His truth will bring forth fruit."

"But I have work enough in Israel."

"True, there is work at home ; but there may be a larger harvest in Assyria, and then they have never heard God's voice. Some one must go or they will die in sin. There are others at home to do the work here."

"They are but beasts in Assyria. They eat Jehovah's bounties and bow before hideous idols."

"The more urgent is your message. If God feeds them why should He not have their worship?"

"I have no time ; my schools ——"

"Thy schools will soon close till after harvest. The summer is thy best time for such a journey and thou canst return by the opening of thy schools again."

"There are a score of reasons why I cannot go !" exclaimed Jonah.

"Hast thou told them all to Jehovah?" asked Elkanah quietly.

"Why should I? He knoweth all," replied Jonah impatiently.

"Thou art giving Him no chance to guide thee. Canst thou not trust Him?"

"I shall not go," said Jonah firmly.

Elkanah saw he was steadfast-minded and that there was little hope of changing him.

"Goest thou to the Passover next month?" Elkanah asked.

"Not this season. I have lost interest."

"Jonah," said Elkanah solemnly, "if thou hast lost thine interest in the sacrifice it is no strange thing that thou hast lost thy power to discern God's call to Nineveh."

"Am not I a prophet?" exclaimed Jonah.

"Thou art, but the spiritual gift cometh not with the name and office. It is governed by obedience in the life."

"Have I not been faithful in Israel?" insisted Jonah.

"Thou hast, to thine honour be it said, but thou art now come to thy Jordan."

"Thou speakest foolishly."

"Thinkest thou so? A prophet should be more discerning."

"I will no longer be a prophet," exclaimed Jonah impatiently.

"Why speakest thou so rashly? 'Tis as though thou wast trying to crush all hope of guidance."

"What is the use to continue when my work will be all for naught?"

"How could it be for naught? The work is God's."

"Why do aught for Israel, if Assyria is to be preserved and fattened like a ravenous beast that will one day devour us?"

"Why dost thou imagine such evil things? Mark my word, Israel will always have God's care and protection. If He allows us to stumble, He will cause us to rise again with greater strength."

"Assyria devoureth," exclaimed Jonah. "Causing Israel to stumble would not be crime enough for them. They would carry us away forever if they could."

"Will Jehovah die? Can He not fulfill His promise? Every nation around us hath had a thrust at Israel, but God's right arm hath driven them back. God hath delivered Israel many times without the shooting of a single arrow," he continued. "In the days of Elisha God scattered the host of the Syrians till not a man was left. Hast thou forgotten how Israel was starving at noon, but at nightfall every Hebrew house had food in great abundance—food taken from the Syrian camp in the valley at the foot of this very hill?"

"I have not forgotten it, nor have I forgotten how we have paid tribute to those nations and how they have taken captives from among our girls. I would they were dead, especially Assyria," exclaimed Jonah. "Then would Israel be safe."

Elkanah arose and looking Jonah in the face said: "The way to make Israel safe is not to kill all other people, but to cause Israel to live for

Jehovah. Israel hath never suffered save when she sinned."

"I prefer that proud Assyria be not chosen for our chastening rod," said Jonah earnestly in reply. "She would humble us to the dust, and never know when her task was finished."

"Jonah, it is not for us to choose God's tools wherewith He would shape Israel."

"But I can leave the prophet's calling and be free."

"Where wilt thou go?"

"To Joppa."

"And then ——?"

"I know not where."

"Why flee to Joppa?"

"To escape this awful Presence. It is maddening. I shall lose my mind."

"Dost thou believe God is not in Joppa?"

Jonah gave no answer.

"My son, He is there to trap thy wayward feet. That Presence will follow thee though thou dost descend into the depth of the sea."

"He cannot change my course if I go out on the sea for I cannot get back," exclaimed Jonah with a note of triumph.

"Be not too sure. God may have a way already planned to bring thee back."

"Why should He bring me back? I'll spend my days in a foreign land rather than save As-

syria. Israel and Assyria can never dwell together in peace."

"Thou art taking thy life into thine own hands," said Elkanah solemnly.

"That is what Shallum said I would be doing if I went to Nineveh," replied Jonah in contradiction.

"In God's work thou hast His promise of protection, but if thou forsakest Him thou hast lost thy claim upon His care."

"Why do I have these bitter feelings if I am to go to Assyria?" argued Jonah. "It would have been better if God had chosen thee."

"Thou hast had those feelings since that awful night we gathered on thy father's roof. Thy heart was poisoned. Thou hast nursed thy hatred all these years. Thine only hope is to bring thy heart to God and let Him change it."

"Not to love Assyria!" exclaimed Jonah.

"If thou dost refuse to prophesy God's message to Assyria, how canst thou hope to get His thought for other lands,—or even for thine own? Refuse Nineveh and thy work is done. God hath no other work for thee until thou hast accomplished this."

"I care for none," groaned Jonah.

"Let us pray to God for thee," said Elkanah earnestly. "Thy burden is too heavy."

"I have no mind for prayer. It would bring

no relief. Jehovah hath hidden His face and I am troubled."

"When thou canst not pray over thy goings thy way is wrong and thou art, indeed, in danger."

Elkanah knelt and poured out his soul in prayer, but Jonah sat unmoved. "I shall be gone in the morning," he said as Elkanah arose. "There is no relief for me here," and he bade his host good-night.

Ere the morning light broke over the eastern hill Jonah was passing down Samaria's slopes on his way to Joppa.

"I am weary already," he complained, speaking to himself, "but the walk will not be so long and tiresome as yesterday's. I shall soon be on the plain of Sharon, and then I shall have a pleasant path along the shore of the great western sea."

It was hard for Jonah to leave his country. A great lump came up in his throat, and he was compelled many times to brush away the tears from his eyes as he walked away from its long-cherished scenes. His past life came before him with all its pleasant memories and happy associations. "What would Elisha think?" he said. "I wonder if he can see me from the other world, and is he grieved that I must leave the land to save the people that he loved, about whom he prophesied so long and earnestly? He was a

man of courage—and so am I, for there are few who would leave their native land and face an unknown future in a land of strangers to escape this task so strangely thrust upon my burdened soul.”

“Ah, Jonah,” said an inner voice, “thy conduct is more like that of Elijah when he fled from his task and mourned beneath the juniper tree. Thou art a coward.”

“How can one be a coward who sacrifices all that he holds dear, as I am doing, to save this people? It cannot be that these strange fears for Israel are all imagination. No, I drew them from the history of the past and if they happened once they will surely occur again when conditions are the same. I must be right, in spite of all my friends. But what I can’t explain is why I should feel that God hath spoken. Would that He had been as silent as He was to Saul, for I could answer all the rest and leave them speechless and my conscience free. I’ll settle this, however, when I find a ship to some far-off land.”

Jonah’s desire to reach Joppa that afternoon made him hasten with all speed. The sun rose high and poured its burning rays down upon his head until he wished he might stop under the shade of one of the village trees and rest. But there was no stopping. His thoughts urged him on. He was angry at mankind and out of

fellowship with God. He was sick of himself and tired of the whole world. Not one relationship or tie was strong enough to stop him or make him give up his plan. Tragic thoughts rushed through his mind as he hastened along.

"I will win in this fight if it costs my life," said he, quickening his pace with the impulse of the thought. "If I only reach a boat and get started it will all be over. Nothing can hinder me then; but there is no telling what may happen before that. I may fall ill or suffer an accident. I hope this terrible trial may be my last."

Jonah's conscience was still awake although he had tried hard to silence it. The time was fast passing, in which he could be aroused and rescued, and this caused the inner man to cry out in a desperate last appeal.

"Thou hast broken thy vow," the voice seemed to say.

"I am willing to be a prophet still, and to do anything, save to help Assyria devour God's chosen people."

"Canst thou accept the work of a prophet and act independently?"

"A man ought not to be forced to act against his whole nature."

"Who knoweth best?" said the inner voice. "Thy way may be basely selfish. Wouldst thou not allow Jehovah to offer His salvation to the

heathen? Thou didst take it for thyself and wilt thou deny it to others?"

Jonah felt the sting of his own reasonings. Since the call came to go to Nineveh he had kept his mind in constant antagonism to the thought. He used his God-given reasoning powers to reason himself out of his duty to obey.

"Thou hast deceived thyself and now thou art driven like a thistle before the wind," said conscience. "Thou hast forced thy mind to doubt and thy will to disobey and now they have united to force thee, perhaps, to death. Thou hast hardened thy heart against God, and God hath left thee to drink thy bitter portion to the very dregs."

"I wish I could feel differently towards Assyria," he said half regretfully, but he had thought so persistently against it that his mind seemed to have lost its power to change.

The sun was high and the air very warm. Jonah was weary to the point of exhaustion when suddenly there opened before him between the hills the beautiful expanse of the great western sea and the busy city of Joppa stretching along the shore. "I shall soon be there," he said.



XV. Setting Sail from Joppa



ONAH arrived in Joppa shortly after the sun had passed the zenith. He was weary and worn. The last few days had weakened him in body and in mind. He was like one dazed—caught by a delusion and swept on to hazardous things; like one whose fancy had dethroned his reason and with swift pace was sweeping him to destruction.

“It may be too late for the ships to start to-day,” he said to himself, “but I will go straight to the landing and see if there is one leaving soon. No matter what ship, nor to what port it may go, I wish not to remain in this land another night.”

He entered the city, passed among the thickly clustered flat-roofed houses which lined the narrow streets, and made his way straight towards the place where the boats were anchored. People stared at him, for he was

dressed in a plain prophet's garb. Even the dogs seemed to know that he was a stranger and carried the word along the street with their barking. Children looked at him and laughed ; some mocked.

"My soul is sick within me," groaned the prophet in despair. "These heathen people seem to know me. Oh, that I were in a desert wilderness ! Oh, to be alone if only for an hour !"

At the main street leading to the harbour he stopped suddenly. Over a shop door he read : "PHŒNICIAN MERCHANTS. Fastest ships on the sea," and on a bulletin by the door, "Vessel just leaving for Tarshish." Jonah's heart gave a leap. He was in the shop in an instant.

"Where is thy boat for Tarshish?" he exclaimed.

"Too late to ship thy goods now," said the merchant, seeing the stranger's anxiety.

"I have nothing to ship," said Jonah impatiently. "I wish to go myself."

"There is not a moment to lose, then," exclaimed the merchant. "Dost thou know our boats?"

"I am a stranger here. Canst thou not go with me?" urged Jonah.

"My lad," called the merchant to his shop boy, "show this stranger our vessel for Tarshish. Make haste. Tell the boatmen that they must get him on board."

Jonah followed the boy as fast as his worn-out body would permit. Because of the departing ship, the street was thronged with busy people even at that hour of the day. Loaded donkeys and camels, hucksters peddling their wares, shoppers making their purchases, so filled the narrow passages that it was impossible to make rapid progress. Once Jonah was almost knocked down by a loaded donkey which was dodging about to escape a beating from its master.

"Shall I miss the ship?" he asked the boy anxiously.

"I can tell thee in a moment," replied the lad, quickening his pace.

"What shall I do if it hath gone?" exclaimed Jonah, his heart growing sick with fear. "When will there be another ship, my son?"

"Fourteen days hence," replied the boy.

"Oh, hasten! I dare not miss this one!" exclaimed the prophet.

The boy suddenly stopped where a house had been torn down which gave a view of the sea from the street. "There it is," he cried joyfully as he started on. "Thou must hasten; the sailors are hauling up the great sheets and the wind will soon drive the ship to sea."

Jonah laboured along with all his might. "I shall be glad when this is over," he cried in despair.

A moment more and they stood by the water's

edge. The great ship, with its huge sails spread to the breeze, was tossing on the restless waves a few hundred feet from the shore. The sailors were hoisting the heavy anchor and the ship was already beginning to respond to the gentle pressure of the breeze.

"Phœnician boatmen!" called the boy in lusty tones.

Four men sprang from their seats by the beach. "What now?" they said.

"The master insists that this traveller must get on that boat for Tarshish," urged the boy.

"But the ship is going," exclaimed the tired oarsmen who had been rowing back and forth since morning.

"But the master commands it," insisted the lad.

"Get in then," grumbled the men impatiently, as they reached for the oars. Jonah stepped down into the little boat; the men quickly turned its prow towards the great ship and began pulling at the oars in earnest.

"Signal the ship to wait," Jonah said to the lad, at the same time thanking him for his help.

"Thou wilt reach it," said the boy assuringly.

The oarsmen were men of great strength and skill. They dodged among the other boats which thronged the harbour, ran around the rocks that jutted out of the water and escaped those just hidden from sight, until Jonah looked at

them with astonishment and admiration. Beyond the reef of rocks, the waves ran higher. The little boat tossed on the billows while the sturdy boatmen bent more strenuously to their task. It plunged and rolled until Jonah grew dizzy and faint. He could almost have asked them to take him back to land but they were approaching the ship. As they drew near the boatmen shouted to the sailors, "The master bids you take this traveller on board."

"Cast him up, then. We cannot stop now," shouted back the officer.

A rope was thrown down, which Jonah fastened around his body. He handed the boatmen a generous sum for bringing him out and they signalled the sailors to draw him up on the vessel.

His reception on the deck was not friendly. "That fellow would try to stop the sun, if he took a notion," growled one of the men.

"He's no sailor," said another. "He is sick already. See how white his face hath become," and a merry laugh went up from the crew at work near by.

"The shipmaster wishes to see you," said one of the officers, motioning to Jonah to follow him.

The shipmaster was an elderly man, with erect form, broad shoulders and sharply chiselled features. His beard was gray and his countenance

weather-beaten from his long life on the sea. As Jonah looked at the face before him it seemed as if he had met the man before. Those sharp black eyes and the thin, firm lips had made an impression on his memory somewhere in earlier years, but he was too worn and sick now to try to recall the time or place.

The shipmaster looked at Jonah sternly and asked, "Where art thou going?"

"I desire to reach Tarshish," replied Jonah.

"Hast thou the fare?" demanded the shipmaster gruffly.

"I have," replied Jonah, handing him the necessary amount.

"Thou art going a long distance," said the master, casting another searching glance at the new passenger.

"How many days ere we arrive?" asked Jonah earnestly.

"Three and twenty days in fair weather," replied the shipmaster, turning to watch the ship's course.

"So long?" said Jonah, who knew nothing of travel on the sea.

"So long!" roared the shipmaster in derision. "This is the swiftest ship that sails the sea. Others take twice as long."

"I know but little of the ships travelling upon these great seas," said Jonah, in excuse for his ignorance.

"Thou mayest have enough of it this time!" laughed the shipmaster, looking into the pale face before him. "Our roughest weather comes at this season."

Jonah's physical weariness and his half sick condition from the tossing of the boat made him seek to be alone. He remembered his visit to the ship in Tyre when a boy, and the place below the deck where they stored the freight for Tarshish. Just then the ship gave a sudden lurch which nearly threw him off his feet. This was quickly followed by a long plunge. "I'll find that place again," he said. Slowly making his way below he crept back along the side of the ship and threw himself down, a tired, sick man. "My heart is like wax," he moaned. "My strength is dried up and I am brought unto the dust of death." The long walk, the mental strain, the loss of rest at night had made him ill from weakness and he sank into a feverish sleep in spite of the tossing of the vessel.



XVI. The Prophet Cast Overboard



ON deck, all was excitement. A strong breeze sprang up from the south which drove the ship rapidly on its northern course.

"Fine breeze," said one of the passengers to the captain.

"If it only continues," replied the captain.

"We should arrive at Cæsarea by the time the sun has set."

"Yea, at this rate," responded the captain with a nod.

But they were not to go as they planned, for when but a few leagues off Cæsarea a sudden squall, which nearly capsized the vessel, swept down upon them from the hill country of Samaria. It was followed by a "sirocco." "Trouble ahead!" exclaimed the captain as he felt the puff of the warm land breeze.

The first roll of the vessel was all the sailors needed for a warning. They poured out of their quarters and dashed away to their

well-known posts of duty, while the captain shouted his orders, gesticulating frantically.

“Down with every sail, or we shall turn over,” he shouted. “This wind will drive us out to sea and we shall be lost.”

The men toiled like slaves, but their progress was slow. The huge sheets, caught by the wind, dragged them over the deck, sometimes almost carrying them overboard.

Hours passed before they finished lashing the tackling and sails fast to the ship. In the meantime the storm was rising higher and higher; waves were dashing over the sides, while the wind-swept spray wet the sailors to the skin. They had cast anchor at the first warning but the ship was fast dragging them out. Men worked by turns at the long oars to keep it from drifting, but with little success. The whitened faces of the sailors showed they were beginning to realize that they might never see land and kindred again.

The instinct of prayer, found among all people in times of trouble, took possession of each person. Every man cried unto his god, most of their gods being patron deities supposed to control the wind, sea or storms. The roar of the wild night winds, the crashing of the heavy billows against the ship, making the old vessel creak and groan as if it were being rent asunder, caused them to cry more desperately to their

gods. The superstitions always found among idolaters added greatly to their alarm.

"The gods are angry with us!" cried a sailor, throwing himself before his idol.

"Oh, god of the waves, be merciful!" exclaimed another, casting an offering into the sea.

Their prostrations were suddenly ended by the vigorous command of the shipmaster.

"Overboard with the cargo! spare nothing! We cannot outride this storm," he shouted.

"What first?" several of the sailors cried.

"Cast forth the wares into the sea," replied the shipmaster.

The sailors hastened to the work. Boxes and bags, things beautiful and costly, were hurled into the sea like chaff. Nothing had any value if it added weight to the ship.

"'Tis sad, sad, to lose all this wealth," said a merchant passenger who was watching his goods plunge into the water.

"Yes," said an officer, "but now it's thy goods or thy life."

"True," said the merchant. "I've thought of nothing but my wealth and now it's gone."

"And thou mayest go with it in a few moments," exclaimed the officer.

"Oh, what shall I do?" cried the merchant, sinking to his knees. "I'm not ready to die. Ye gods, have mercy!"

Above the roar of the sea the officer could be

heard shouting to the shipmaster, "The ship is cleared! What next?"

He had scarcely spoken the words when the vessel fell into a trough where two seas met. The shock was terrific and the ship was like to have been broken.

"We would have gone down then had not the wares been thrown over!" exclaimed the officer.

The shipmaster shouted: "We're almost a wreck! Strip the ship of everything except the long oars."

Desperately the men went to work; even the merchant helped; since his wares were lost he had a different view of life and had made a new resolution to put less value on wealth. Rope, sails, tackling, poles, tables and furniture—everything went into the sea.

"All overboard," shouted the officer to the shipmaster.

"We should have done that before the vessel became so wrenched," answered the captain. "I fear we are too late." Every man stood pale and trembling in the face of almost certain death.

It seemed as if the winds blew from every direction and met over the ship; at times the vessel trembled like a leaf, as if some unseen hand were shaking it for revenge. The men appealed to their gods again. Their cries were frantic because more than ever they realized their helplessness.

"It is a frightful tempest," exclaimed a sailor. "For twenty years I've sailed these seas and have never seen its equal."

"I tell you it is the revenge of the gods," urged one of the crew.

"Revenge? For what?" demanded the officer.

"I know not. It may be because of some one on the ship."

"Shipmaster," called the officer, "is there any one on the ship who has not prayed to his god?"

"Would that I knew," replied the shipmaster. "Call all hands," commanded the shipmaster. "Count the passengers and crew and see if all are here."

"All here but one," called the officer in a moment.

"Who is that?"

Glancing at his list, he replied, "The man who was pulled up after we set sail."

"I knew he would bring us evil," exclaimed the pilot.

"Where is he?" the shipmaster asked.

"I know," shouted a sailor; "when we unloaded the wares I found him away down in the side of the ship, too sick to move."

"Show me where he is," exclaimed the shipmaster, starting below.

The sailor led the way to where Jonah lay

asleep from sickness and exhaustion. The shipmaster gave him a vigorous shaking which awakened him with a start.

"What meanest thou, O sleeper?" exclaimed the shipmaster. "Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not."

Jonah arose but could scarcely walk, he was so weak. "Why did I come?" he moaned, placing his hand to his sick, aching head. "God is following me. Truly the Psalmist said: 'Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind.'"

"That is the fellow," cried a sailor as Jonah approached the group. The shipmaster, fearing some of the men might do him injury, kept close by his side. No one knew what to do further. Some cried one thing and some another. All seemed to suspect that the stranger was an evil person who had angered his god.

"Come and let us cast lots," said several in a breath, "that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us."

The shipmaster held the box while each drew his lot. One, two, three, four drew—all were free.

"It is your turn, stranger," said the shipmaster to Jonah.

Jonah reached out his trembling hand towards the box. He felt the thing had already been de-

cided by Jehovah and that his doom was sealed. When his hand was drawn out, lo, there lay the deciding lot.

"I told you so!" cried a sailor. They crowded around him in an instant. Questions came rapidly.

"Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us."

"Whence comest thou?" asked one.

"What is thine occupation?" demanded another.

"What is thy country?"

"Of what people art thou?"

Jonah gathered his strength to answer. Should he tell the real truth, or keep silent? He might escape if he could clear himself in their eyes. In an instant the heroic blood of his father leaped in his veins. "My honoured father's name, 'Amittai,' meant 'truth-telling,'" he thought. "Far be it from me to belie his name and disgrace his memory even here among these heathen." He faced them squarely and said, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the Lord, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land."

"He hath no fear of this storm!" exclaimed the pilot.

"He brought no idol," said a sailor.

"The Hebrews do not worship idols," explained the pilot. "They worship a living God."

"Why art thou here?" demanded a rough sailor.

"I have fled from His presence," continued Jonah, pointing towards heaven, "because of a command He gave me which I was loth to fulfill."

A blinding flash, followed by a heavy peal of thunder made the men exceedingly afraid and they said to him: "Why hast thou done this?"

"I could not bear to go and save a lifelong enemy of my people, whom I have hated from my youth."

The shipmaster and crew were puzzled and asked, "Wilt thou not now repent and promise thy God that thou wilt go if He will save thee and us?"

"I will not go to Nineveh," replied Jonah emphatically, amid the roar of the wind and sea.

"But thou hast caused the loss of all our wares and the tackling of our ship. We could not replace it all for ten talents of gold."

Jonah was silent, partly because of faintness, for the terrible sickness from the tossing of the vessel made him almost wish to die. Then they said unto him: "What shall we do unto thee that the sea may be calm unto us?"

Despair was written on his face which had become ghastly pale. "I cannot give up," he said.

"Tell us quickly what shall we do," cried the sailors impatiently.

With an expression on his haggard face which pleaded for mercy, Jonah moaned : " Take me up and cast me forth into the sea ; so shall the sea be calm unto you ; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you," and he sank down exhausted on the deck.

" We cannot do it!" exclaimed the shipmaster, looking into the haggard face of the stranger.

" Put fresh men on the oars," he commanded. " See if we can make any progress towards land." The men rowed hard but without avail. The roar of the waves and wind was deafening. The vessel shivered from stem to stern and some declared they were going down.

Seeing that their own gods were unable to save them those not working at the oars dropped on their knees and prayed unto the God of the stranger. " We beseech Thee, O Lord," they cried, " we beseech Thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood, for Thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleaseth Thee."

" We are being blown farther from land," called the officer.

" Cannot the men pull harder?" replied the shipmaster.

" They are almost dead now from the work."

" Put on more men."

" The oars will break."

Just then a sailor approached the shipmaster and said : " Art thou going to let us all perish for the sake of trying to save that stranger ? "

The shipmaster answered : " Never on any ship has a man been thrown overboard for such a cause. "

" But he hath confessed he offended his God ! "

" Yea, and told us he was the cause of this evil, " urged the officer.

The shipmaster's face was troubled. " I have always prided myself that I never lost a person at sea, " he said slowly.

" This stranger himself says that thine only hope is to throw him over, " insisted the sailor.

" He declared the sea would be quiet if thou wouldst, " added the officer.

" It is hard to do, " said the shipmaster, moving towards Jonah.

" Stranger, " he said, " I greatly fear that we must take thee at thy word. Thou hast told us if we cast thee into the sea it would be calm. Dost thou still think so ? " the shipmaster asked, leaning over the bowed form of the prophet.

" Yea, " said Jonah, " I care not what becomes of me ; I grieve to have caused thee this loss. "

The shipmaster motioned his consent to the sailors ; they carefully lifted the limp form of the stranger and dropped it over the side of the ship just as the gray dawn of the morning was breaking in the east.

Like magic the roar of the wind ceased. It was like the departing of some mighty giant from the field of carnage, muttering as he goes. The waves became calm as if caressed by some gentle hand that loved peace and brought affliction only for a noble purpose.

The sailors looked at one another in astonishment.

"The stranger's God is the true God!" exclaimed the man who had been so outspoken.

"Let us offer a sacrifice to the God of the Hebrews," commanded the shipmaster.

All gathered on deck for the service. A strange stillness reigned over the vessel. The boisterous wind had quieted to a soft, gentle breeze and the rolling sea had ceased its raging. Every one felt conscious that some Divine Presence was hovering over them and every heart was bowed with a new realization of the infinite power, love and justice of the new God about whom they had learned from the stranger.

"I shall worship this God as long as I live," said the merchant after the service was over.

"Thou dost not mind the loss of thy wares?" inquired the shipmaster.

"Nay, nay!" exclaimed the merchant. "I have a strange peace that is worth more than all the wares I ever owned."

"I, too, would go through it all again to learn of the true God," said the officer.

The outspoken sailor exclaimed: "I never believed in this idol, but I worshiped it because I knew no better. I'm done with it forever," he added, tossing the image into the sea.

"I can worship a God who can handle the wind like that!" exclaimed the pilot. "He made it blow just hard enough to get His man and then caused it to stop."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed the merchant.

"He was a prophet to us, even if he would not go to those other people," remarked the shipmaster.

"Poor fellow," said the merchant; "it cost him his life to teach us about his God."

"Yea, he is dead long ago," remarked the officer, "and has been devoured, too, by this time."

"I have vowed to worship this God of gods," said the shipmaster.

"So have I," replied the officer.

"And I!" came from a chorus of voices. Never had the crew known such strange joy or concern for each other.

"Now let us make for land!" called the shipmaster. "Get the men at the long oars."

"It's a good thing we saved them," said one of the sailors as he laid hold of an oar.

The men were well exhausted, but the new-found joy in the God of the stranger put fresh

life into the crew and they bent to the oars with a will.

"We are north and west of Cæsarea," said the shipmaster, who had been making observations.

"Are we far out?" asked the merchant.

"Some distance," was the reply, "but we shall make good speed, for the ship is light and the tide is running with us."

"Cæsarea is in sight!" called the pilot after a few hours' rowing.

"Two hours more!" laughed the happy sailors, and forgetting their fatigue they sang with the rhythm of the dipping oars. The time flew rapidly as they drew nearer and nearer to the city.

"People are running down to the shore!" called the pilot.

"They know what such storms mean to sailors," remarked the officer.

The crowd met them at the landing place full of eagerness to hear their story.

"How have ye escaped?" they shouted.

A group clustered around each of the crew and officers and listened eagerly to the story.

"Threw a man into the sea!" exclaimed a woman as the shipmaster reached that point in the story. "How cruel!"

"Why didst thou do that?" demanded a man who drew near the shipmaster as though he would like to return the treatment.

The shipmaster explained : "The man said he had fled from the call of his God to go to Nineveh and cry against its wickedness."

"But why throw him into the sea?" continued the spokesman.

"He told us to do so. He said it was the only thing that would save us."

"How did it come out?"

"My friend, I've been a sailor all my life but I never saw anything like it. The moment the sailors tossed him into the sea the wind stopped as if some one had seized it."

"You got the right man," said the spokesman, drawing back out of the throng.

The shipmaster told how the whole crew turned to worship the God of the stranger, offering Him sacrifices and making vows.

The story made a deep impression on the whole city. Strangers in the place carried the marvellous tale back to their homes, and thus it went even to Gath-hepher.



XVII. The Sorrowing Wife



"WHAT news is this?" asked Nathan, who came into his home just as his son was relating a story he had heard in Samaria.

"Oh, father, there is great excitement in Samaria over a story from the sea."

"About what, my son?"

"There has been a terrible wind on the great sea which has caused much damage to the ships. A vessel brought the story that one of its passengers confessed that he was the cause of the storm."

"How could such a thing be?" asked Nathan skeptically.

"He offended his God, they said, and when the sailors asked him what they should do about it he told them to throw him into the sea."

"Did they do it?" asked Nathan.

"Yea, and as soon as he was cast overboard the wind ceased."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed

Nathan with increasing interest. "Of what nation was he?"

"He told the sailors that he was an Hebrew."

"I cannot believe that," said Nathan, leaning back in his chair. "It sounds like one of the sailor stories. Thou art old enough, my son, not to be deceived by such superstitious notions. Never was such a thing heard of among the Hebrews."

"The sailors said he seemed like a truthful man."

"How was it, then, that he had offended his God?"

"He told them his God wanted him to go to Nineveh, and he ——"

"Nineveh!" exclaimed Nathan, springing to his feet.

"Yea; he said he was called to go and cry against the wickedness of the city, and he refused."

"Where did he get on the vessel?" asked Nathan, excitedly.

"They said he reached Joppa three days ago and got on just as the boat was setting sail."

Nathan left the room immediately to conceal his grief. "It was Jonah!" he cried. "Verily Jehovah hath dealt very heavily with him. And yet he brought it all upon himself."

His grief and sorrow were deep. The old

man had looked upon Jonah as his son, for he had watched him grow up from childhood. "I had great hopes for him," he sobbed. "He was such a promising youth. But his self-will has been his downfall and he is buried in the sea. Oh, Jonah, my son, my son!" he cried. "Would that I had striven with thee more earnestly, for thou mightest have listened at last and thy life been spared. But now it is too late. Thou art gone and I must bear thy disgrace with thee."

Long did the aged villager brood over his sorrow for it was as if he had buried his first born in disgrace. Suddenly he thought of Peninnah. "It will kill her," he said, "for she spake bitterly against his going to Nineveh. I must find out at once if she has heard the terrible news."

Restraining his grief, Nathan went out to find his son. "Hast thou told the story in the village?" he asked.

"I told the keeper of the inn at the gate," replied the young man.

"Then it will soon be known by all," said Nathan, turning sadly away. "I must see Jonah's wife at once and comfort her, for the grief will be more than she can bear. What sadness one self-willed act can cause and how many lives must bear the disgrace!"

Nathan seized his staff and walked down the village street as fast as his great age would per-

mit. On his way he overheard the innkeeper telling the story to a group in the street.

"I don't believe it!" was a remark that fell on his ear. "Those people on the coast have mixed their heathen superstitions with our Hebrew religion. They are always trying to belittle our God and make Him like their own."

Nathan evaded the group for fear they would ask his opinion.

"I am glad," he said, "that Jonah's behaviour is known to only a few in Gath-hepber because it would make much talk and bring no sympathy for such a rash act."

Trembling with anxiety, the aged villager hastened into Jonah's yard, where he found Peninnah busy at work. Approaching her he said: "Hast thou heard the strange story from the sea?"

"My son heard at the village gate that some man had been thrown from one of the ships because he had offended his God," she replied.

"Thinkest thou that it is true?"

"I do not know. Worse things have occurred," replied Peninnah. "It is sad that men bring such punishments upon themselves."

Nathan's voice trembled as he asked, "Hast thou thought who the man might be?"

"Why," said Peninnah, her suspicions suddenly aroused by Nathan's manner, "didst thou know him?"

"Hast thou heard from thy husband these four days?" inquired Nathan.

"He is in Samaria," she said hesitatingly.

The aged Nathan broke down. Tears ran across his furrowed cheeks and his whole frame trembled with emotion.

Peninnah was deeply moved by his grief. "Tell me thy sorrow, father Nathan. Would that Jonah were here to comfort thee. Hast thou lost one of thy kinsmen in the storm?"

"Nay, nay, my daughter. Were it so perhaps I could bear it better. I fear this strange story is about none other than Jonah."

"How could that be?" she exclaimed, a look of horror leaping into her eyes.

"The man said he was an Hebrew and that he had been sent to Nineveh but had refused to go."

"Oh, it is my husband," she cried frantically. "Why did I not keep him by my side? Shall I never see him again?"

"Jehovah knoweth," said Nathan tenderly. "I told him that he should obey Jehovah but he would not listen. I told him God would take care of all his troubles but he refused. And now he has paid the awful price of disobedience. Oh, Jonah, Jonah! my dear lost son."

"It is all my fault for I forbade him going to Nineveh," exclaimed Peninnah, "and it drove him from me and from God. Oh, that I had him back! He should go a thousand times."

"I fear it is too late, if the story be true," said Nathan.

"Oh, to think that I should have spoiled the work of Jehovah, and I the wife of His prophet."

"Thou shouldst have rejoiced in the honour Jehovah placed upon thy husband," continued Nathan.

"Yea, I know it now. But oh, my wicked heart was selfish. Would that the curse had fallen on me and not on my beloved," said she, sobbing violently. Nathan comforted her with many tender words and offered an earnest prayer that God would guard and pity the sorrowing home.

"Thou art a father, indeed," she said, as he rose to leave. "Wilt thou find out if the story be really true?" she urged.

"That I will, at once," promised Nathan.

The next few days were filled with bitterness for the friends of the wayward prophet, but in all their sorrow they kept it from becoming known in the village. Peninnah's grief almost overwhelmed her. "If I had only been kind to him, he might be with me now," she would say, over and over. At times the disgrace weighed terribly on her mind and no words of comfort seemed to bring relief. "My wickedness consumes me, and my sins thrust me through like sharpened arrows. Would that I was now with him whose rebellious ways I shared!" she cried.

"I do not deserve to be free while he receives such awful punishment."

Only those who have passed through such dark hours know how bitter the cup of sorrow can be made by the poison of wrong-doing. Remorse and hopeless despair seem ground up together in a maddening potion.

Though Nathan tried faithfully to find evidence that the report was not true, he was unsuccessful. The more he searched the more the story was confirmed, and he was at last compelled to give up hope and to bear to the grief-stricken wife the comfortless news that Jonah, in all probability, had been devoured by some monster of the sea.

"My light has gone out in darkness," she cried. "My beloved is dead, and I, whither shall I go?"



XVIII. A Miraculous Escape



ONAH was not forgotten of his God who had permitted this terrible experience to come upon him. The mysteries of God's divine plans are often unseen but there is always the sweet certainty that He makes no blunders, and allows no single providence to slip beyond His control.

Jonah's work was not done. God's plans for his life ran deeper than human reason could fathom. The sailors believed him drowned but the Lord who watched them throw him into the sea had prepared a great fish to swallow him.

It was well for Jonah that the storm had prepared him for the terrible experience of being cast into the deep and swallowed by the huge fish. So sick had the tossing ship made him that he was only half conscious of the things that occurred. Though he could think, he was too weak to act.

Hours after hours passed, he knew not how many, for he was in a half-stupor. The battle of his will against the will of Jehovah was fought over and over in his thoughts. Should he allow God to have His way or not?

"Jonah," a voice seemed to say, "once thou didst make Me a vow. Thou hast broken this thy covenant and art turned away from My call. Salvation is not thy gift to man, and thou shouldst not withhold it even from the Assyrians. Thou hast refrained from prayer these many days. Turn from thy self-willed ways and be My helper still. I can yet deliver thee."

For a long time the conflict raged in Jonah's soul. "Shall the oracles of God be committed to such heathen as the Assyrians?" he thought.

"Art thou better than they? Think of thy condition and all thou hast brought upon thyself and others."

Jonah felt the pressure of his narrow grave and realized his utter helplessness. His will grew weaker and weaker as his heart realized its sin towards Jehovah and his fellow men. The shame of his punishment softened him into obedience. "I am not better than they," he confessed.

Then Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice, for thou hast cast me

into the deep, in the midst of the seas ; and the floods compassed me about ; all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of sight ; yet I will look again towards thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about even to the soul ; the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains, the earth with her bars was about me forever ; yet thou hast brought my life from corruption, O Lord my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord : and my prayer came in unto thee into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving ; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord.

“ And the Lord spake unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land.”

When Jonah came to himself after his long imprisonment he was near a cliff where the water stands deep at the very shore.

He looked at himself in his plight, and said : “ I might have known some terrible thing would befall me. Jehovah does not provide beds of lilies for His wayward children. How true are His words, ‘ Thine own backslidings shall reprove thee ’ ! ”

A fisherman discovered the strange person in pitiful plight sitting dejectedly by the shore, and approaching him said : “ Thou hast met misfortune, my friend. Wast thou fishing and didst thou by accident fall into the sea ? ”

“ I am weak and tired,” said Jonah evasively.

"Come to my house," said the stranger.

"Is it far?" asked Jonah.

"As near as any, and thou canst ride my beast."

Little did Jonah think that the story of his being cast into the sea had reached his native land. He felt much refreshed after a change of clothing and a good meal in the fisherman's home, and enjoyed talking again after his long silence.

"Our city has been much excited for two days over the story of some Phœnician sailors," said the fisherman.

"Tell me the story," said Jonah, half afraid to listen.

"They said they passed through a terrible storm sent by the God of an Hebrew passenger to punish him."

"Have they been here?" exclaimed Jonah, trying to conceal his embarrassment.

"Yea, they landed at noon two days ago. They said the man confessed his guilt and asked them to throw him into the sea. They strove against committing such a crime until they feared the judgment would fall upon them, for the storm constantly increased in its fury. But the moment the sailors tossed the wretched fellow into the water all the trouble ceased. It seemed as if a mighty hand seized the wind and stopped the storm. They declared they knew by this that they had the guilty man."

"They did, in truth," groaned Jonah.

"They were the happiest sailors we ever saw here," continued the fisherman.

"I should think they would be happy—even as I," said Jonah, though the fisherman did not know the full meaning of his last words.

"Their joy was not only over their escape, but because they had come to know the God of the Hebrews who is so powerful over the wind of the sea."

"And I have sinned against the God of Mercy," thought Jonah.

"From whence art thou?" inquired the fisherman.

"From the land of Zebulun to the north," replied Jonah.

"Thou art welcome to tarry with us," said the fisherman cordially.

"Thou hast cared for me as for an angel and I would gladly tarry longer," replied Jonah, "but I have been away from home too long already and my family will welcome my speedy return."

"I would not keep thee from thy family."

Jonah arose to go. "Canst thou tell me where I may hire a beast to take me to Galilee?" he asked.

"We have an innkeeper who provides beasts for travellers. I will take thee to see him," said the fisherman.

They had almost reached the inn when, as they turned the corner of the street, Jonah suddenly halted. The fisherman was confounded. There stood his guest looking squarely into the face of the broad-shouldered old shipmaster of the ill-fated vessel. For an instant neither spoke. What could it mean?

The shipmaster broke the silence. "Art thou that stranger?" he exclaimed, looking critically at Jonah from head to foot.

"Thou rememberest well the man thy sailors threw into the sea," replied Jonah.

"How camest thou here?" he cried, excitedly putting his hands on the prophet to make certain he was not deceived.

"Thou couldst not believe my story if I should tell thee."

"Indeed I can. After the stilling of those waves, I believe the God of the Hebrews can do anything," he replied excitedly. "Tell me."

"I know not much that happened save that a huge fish took me in its mouth when I fell into the water," said Jonah.

"How wonderful is thy God!" exclaimed the shipmaster.

"Jehovah spake to me again. I saw my sin. When I confessed that He was the author of salvation, and that He had a right to give it to whom He chose, and promised to fulfill my vow, immediately I felt myself thrown out upon the

land where a few moments later this good fisherman found me."

By this time a throng had assembled. Those who heard the story told it in breathless haste to those who could not get near. As the officer and pilot came up the people shouted, "That fellow thou didst throw into the sea is here."

"Thou speakest foolishness," they exclaimed.

The throng gave way that the ship men might see him for themselves. "No man could come through that stormy sea," they said sneeringly as they passed into the midst of the throng. As they reached the centre Jonah turned and looked them in the face.

"It is he!" exclaimed the two, falling back in astonishment.

"Nothing is too great for thy God," said the officer, recovering a little from his shock. A murmur passed through the throng. "They, too, declare it is he," said one to another. The word spread rapidly. Travellers and merchantmen carried the story to Galilee. From there caravans took it away across the desert to Nineveh itself.

As the old shipmaster bade Jonah farewell, he ventured to ask, "Wouldst thou care to tell me why thou didst choose the dangerous sea to make thy escape, instead of going to some place of safety by way of the land?"

"That will I gladly do, since thou hast been my friend. The pressure of that call of God

upon my soul drove me from my country. I thought of places everywhere but none seemed safe until my mind recalled a day when I was but a youth. A trusted neighbour took me to Tyre, where, among other things, I saw the great ships that go and come from Tarshish. A merchant of the city took us on board and I went down into the vessel with an officer whom I have often since wished to meet again,—he was so very kind. The vision of that giant ship with its sails outspread like wings clung to me through all those years and when I sought a place to go to drown my cares, it came afresh with promises that made me feel escape was sure.”

“Hast thou not been on a ship since thou wast in Tyre?”

“I was never on the sea before this present time. Since that day in Tyre I have been half afraid to go.”

“How could that be?”

“The young officer who took me down into the bowels of the ship was a worshiper of idols, and he made my boyish heart afraid by saying that their gods played tricks on them and sometimes made them nearly lose their lives.”

At this the old shipmaster sprang back. His face wore a puzzled look. A gleam of light then flashed across his countenance as he exclaimed: “Dost thou not remember me?”

It all came back as if it had been but yester-

day. The smile of the old shipmaster upon the prophet was the same as the one the officer gave when Jonah was a boy, and which had clung to him through all the years.

"Thou art the officer," exclaimed Jonah, deeply moved.

"And thou that sturdy lad from Zebulun," said the old shipmaster as the tears ran down his cheeks.

A murmur of applause swept through the throng which pressed closely upon the two who had become all unconscious of its presence.

"My life is changed because of thee," exclaimed the grateful old shipmaster. "To my dying day the God thou hast told us of shall be my God, and thou shalt have first place among my friends."

Jonah saw he could not remain longer in the place because of the curious crowd. He secured a beast and set out at once for Zebulun. The throng followed him to the edge of the city where they turned home again, after wishing him a safe journey.

No happier meeting was ever witnessed in Gath-hepher than that of Jonah and his wife.

"Oh, there is father!" cried one of the children as Jonah rode into the yard.

In an instant his wife was by his side. "My husband!" she exclaimed. "It is all untrue that thou wert thrown into the sea."

"I'll tell thee presently, my precious wife," he replied, greeting her affectionately.

Jonah unsaddled the beast and went into the house. His family gathered around him as he related the story of his wonderful experience amid many exclamations and excited questions.

"I will never oppose thy work again," said his wife sobbing. "God hath taught me that His way is best."

"It was not thy sin but mine," said Jonah tenderly. "I had already decided not to obey before I told thee aught about it."

They knelt once more in family worship, which had been given up since the day Jonah received Jehovah's call to go to Nineveh.

"I have the old joy back," said Jonah later in the evening. "God's smile is as sweet as ever."

"How much our sin hath cost us," said his wife shaking her head over the memory of their bitter cup. "And it might all have been avoided."

On the following Sabbath when the family had retired, Jonah thought to spend another quiet evening in meditation and prayer. Again the room was filled with the sweet Presence he had felt before. His soul was hushed into silence. The call came back. "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee."

Though Jonah meditated long upon the call, he did not hesitate to respond to it, for he had learned a new meaning of obedience. The precious Presence grew so sweet to his soul that he fell upon his knees in prayer and worship. "I cannot feel my mind much changed towards Assyria," he said in prayer, "but my love for Thee is much enlarged, O Jehovah of my soul. I know Thee as I never have before. Salvation is from Thee."

The next morning Jonah was astir early, preparing to leave on his mission.

"Jehovah hath called me again to go to Nineveh," he said to his wife as she began to prepare the morning meal.

"'Tis well," she replied meekly. "My heart hath changed about it now."

"My heart is as thy heart," replied her husband.

"I have always looked upon thy work," said she, "as though it were of thine own making; but now I see no work is man's alone. God plans it all, and chooses us to be His servants, that each may execute God's task for Him and thus be honoured."

"He hath chosen us for Himself and we gain our highest good when we serve Him fully," replied Jonah.

"How changed is everything," she said. "The peace of loving obedience has driven

away all the sorrows of rebellion, and I am filled with joy once more." Cheerfully she aided him in the preparations for the journey.

"I must pay a visit to Nathan before I go," said Jonah, "and tell him of my leaving."

"He will rejoice, I know, and would go with thee if he were not so feeble."

Jonah entered the house of the old patriarch with the heartfelt salutation, "Peace be to thee, Nathan."

"And to thee, Jonah. Thou art a picture of health and joy this morning. Hast thou good news?"

"Jehovah hath spoken again of Nineveh and bade me go," said Jonah.

"And thou art pleased to obey, I see."

"Yea," replied Jonah, "although my mind is not changed towards Assyria yet my love for Jehovah hath been rekindled with a new devotion. My soul doth magnify Him for all His mighty works. He calmeth the troubled sea and delivereth His servants out of the deepest depths of sorrow."

"And He will yet deliver thee, Jonah," said Nathan.

"That my soul knoweth right well," replied the prophet.

After prayer Jonah returned home to finish his preparation. "I shall reach the Sea of Tiberias by nightfall and tarry there until I find a caravan

of merchantmen bound for Nineveh," he said to his wife.

"The Lord be gracious unto thee, and bring thee again to me in peace," she replied.



XIX. The Caravan Journey to Nineveh



THE following day, at the sea, Jonah found a small caravan preparing for the long ride across the desert to Nineveh. It was composed of merchantmen well acquainted with the conditions existing in all that region round about.

"May I travel with thee over the desert?" said Jonah to the head man of the company.

The man looked at him from under a pair of shaggy eyebrows. "Whither goest thou?" he asked sternly.

"To Nineveh," replied Jonah calmly.

"What is thy business there?" asked the man, his black eyes still fastened upon the prophet.

"I have a matter with the king and his people," said Jonah.

"What is thy name?"

"My name is Jonah. I am from Zebulun."

"What is thine occupation?"

"I am a teacher of righteousness," said Jonah meekly.

The rough man broke into a hearty laugh. "Thou wilt find plenty of need there for thy preaching," said he.

"Then by thy favour I may accompany thee?" asked Jonah.

"Thou mayest, indeed, if thou canst endure our poor accommodation. We can furnish thee a camel, if thou so sayest."

"I thank thee," replied Jonah heartily. "I am used to travel and shall enjoy thy company."

"We start on the morrow at daybreak," said the man, with a parting gesture.

Daylight found them on the way. The caravan was soon stretched out in a long line over the desert path. The camels plodded slowly along with their heavy loads, while their masters, perched high upon their bags of merchandise, swayed back and forth in rhythm with the motion of the beasts.

"This swaying brings to remembrance the motion of the Phœnician ship at sea," said Jonah to himself. "But I would rather be here than there."

On the way, Jonah became acquainted with the men who composed the caravan. Ishmael, the leader, was especially interesting. He was a descendant of Abraham and Hagar. Large golden earrings adorned his ears according to

the custom of his tribe. He travelled as far as Egypt, carrying balm, spices and myrrh, bringing back loads of fine linen which was in great demand in the Eastern world. He was a black-eyed man of friendly, jovial nature, and well informed about things in general from Egypt to Assyria. With him were two servants who cared for the camels by day and slept on the merchandise at night to protect it from being stolen. Another man in the company was an Egyptian, named Kushak, a carver of stone ornaments and hieroglyphics, who hoped to find work in the temples of Nineveh. A Phœnician of excellent birth, Phorantas by name, was with the company. He was the agent of a Phœnician ship owner, and had secured good business in Nineveh for his master. The others who completed the caravan were traders and merchants, the group numbering ten men in all.

Jonah found it easy to become acquainted with them, though he especially enjoyed Ishmael and Phorantas.

During the heat of the day, the caravan halted at a stream, or spring, if one could be found, and the time was spent in sleep after eating a little barley bread and cheese; all looked forward to the cool evening and the pleasant chats to be had while gathered around the camp-fire where the food was being cooked. Jonah took advantage of these occasions to learn all he

could of the strange city to which he had been sent.

"How great a city is Nineveh?" he asked, the first evening.

"Thou wilt have to count them," said the illiterate Egyptian.

Phorantas saw that Jonah was a man of education and refinement and realized that such an answer was disagreeable to him, so he quietly remarked: "It hath been estimated that there are nearly a million people in Nineveh."

"It is the largest city of our times," declared Ishmael, seating himself in the circle around the fire.

"Do you know its size?" asked Jonah, thinking he might need to walk through it.

"It is four hundred and eighty stadia around it," replied Ishmael. "By camel it requires three days to make the journey."

"So far?" said Jonah, comparing it with distances in his own land. "From Gath-hepher to Gilgal, and all one city!" He shuddered with fear.

"Thou shouldst see their buildings, Jonah," said Phorantas. "They are the wonder of the world."

"Travellers of wealth come all the way across this desert just to see their gardens and palaces," declared Ishmael. "I have had many of them in my caravans."

"The temples are wonderful, and their idols too," said Kushak. "You know they are great idolaters in Nineveh."

Ishmael motioned to his servant to put more fuel on the fire and then remarked, "Their idolatry hath become their disgrace. All the priests desire is to drink the wine of the sacrifice. I've seen them so drunken in their religious processions that not one of them could walk without stumbling."

"Shame!" exclaimed Jonah, as the thought came home to him. "Such are the people to whom I am sent. Jehovah surely hath more love for them than I."

"Where get they money for all those palaces and gardens?" asked Ishmael's servant, whose earnings scarcely clothed and fed him.

"They are robbers," said Ishmael. "They tax us beyond reason on everything we bring."

"Our country pays them tribute," remarked Phorantas of Phœnicia.

"So doth our Samaria, and Edom and Philistia give them tribute," said Jonah.

Ishmael declared that it was the king's wine that made him cruel but Phorantas insisted that the whole nation was cruel.

"What causeth them to be so?" asked Jonah.

"Ignorance!" exclaimed Phorantas. "It hath been told me that not more than one in a thousand can read."

"How can they do business?" inquired the Egyptian.

"Oh, they can drive a bargain and count the money without being able to read," laughed Ishmael.

"I've done business with them for years," said Phorantas. "It is only the upper class that can read at all, and as for the soldiers—they are brutes."

"I've heard so all my life," said Jonah, nervously.

A roguish smile broke over Ishmael's face as he said: "What thinkest thou, Jonah? Canst thou change them by thy preaching?"

Jonah only shrugged his shoulders, which all understood as meaning he preferred not to reply. Kushak gave a long yawn, his example being followed by others and the tired party rolled up in their cloaks for the night. At the break of day they were away again for another ride over the burning sands. Thus the time passed slowly by.

"Three days more and we reach Nineveh," said Ishmael to Jonah one evening. "Hast thou enjoyed the journey?"

"Truly I have," replied Jonah. "Thou hast been a royal host and guide; and I have been most pleased to learn so much about Nineveh around our camp-fire."

"Yea, we gather much for our minds from the

travellers on these journeys," said Ishmael. "Before long we shall see the Assyrian shepherds and herders of camel," he continued.

The day before coming in sight of Nineveh the caravan halted for the night by a stream where the Assyrian shepherds had folds for their flocks. Other caravans from Damascus rested there, making the place look like a small village. The group that gathered for the evening chat was unusually large. Naturally the subject was Nineveh, the great city of the East, to which they were going on the morrow.

One man, named Zophar, interested Jonah most, for he said he had just come from Nineveh where he had been in business for two years.

"Tell me of the city," entreated Jonah, "for I have never seen it."

"Thou shalt behold a wonderful place," said Zophar. "It hath no equal in the whole world. There are gardens lifted in mid-air and filled with rich plants and rare and beautiful animals. The palace buildings rise story upon story, their battlements flashing in the sunlight with inlaid gold, silver and precious stones. The city gates are massive and the streets so wide that many chariots can roll abreast on them. Its temples and idols are the wonders of the world. I have seen its armies return laden with plunder and the king of Assyria riding to his temple in a chariot drawn by the kings he had captured."

Jonah's heart grew sick. "What if that should be the fate of Israel," he said to himself. "I have heard the people are much given to idolatry," he remarked aloud.

"Much given to idolatry!" exclaimed Zophar. "The world has not their equal in that, either. Unchaste carvings adorn their temple walls on every side, while their gods are pictured in all manner of deeds of vice and sin. Their worship is the vilest to be found, and the chief purpose of each sacrificial feast is that they may drink wine to the health of the gods. Their nights are spent in debauchery and their days in dishonesty and greed."

"Dost thou think the inhabitants will ever repent of their terrible wickedness?" asked Jonah.

"That I cannot tell," replied Zophar. "They may not, and yet ——" he stopped abruptly.

"And yet?" queried Jonah eagerly.

"They may," said Zophar meditatively.

"Why dost thou think they may repent?" asked Jonah, trying to draw out the secret.

"The city has begun to think of it, at least," replied Zophar.

"How can that be?" urged Jonah, fearing he would lose the information he desired.

"A story from the West has reached them."

"What story?" pleaded Jonah.

"A traveller from Samaria told of a man in his

country who was called by his God to come and preach against the wickedness of Nineveh. He refused and ran away to sea. A storm broke out. He confessed that he was the cause of it because he refused to go. The sailors threw him into the sea at his own demand, and the wind stopped at once."

"Has the king heard this story?" asked Jonah earnestly.

"Indeed he has, and it is reported that he was much affected by it and declares he is going to stop so much drinking."

"What a strange thing!" remarked Jonah.

Zophar straightened up as with a sudden impression and said, "If that story be true and the man had come here instead of playing the coward, I believe the whole city of Nineveh would have repented."

"Just as I feared," said Jonah to himself. "They all think me a coward."

"If the story be true," continued Zophar, "the man was a fool to be false with his God, for a God that can cause repentance in a city like Nineveh and know just when to send a man to warn them, is a God worth worshipping." Jonah wished to tell Zophar of Jehovah, but the rebuke so filled him with shame that he could not speak.

Stirred by the memory of his experiences in Nineveh Zophar spake on, not noticing the effect of his words on his listener.

"Those people in Nineveh have never had a chance to know much better than they do. Let some one teach them better ways and they may change at once."

"But are they not grossly immoral?" asked Jonah.

"What else can you expect? Their priests teach it to them and it is woven into the history of all their gods. Their religious gatherings are but degrading orgies and their feasts only times of debauchery."

Jonah's face flushed with indignation. "I have seen some of the evils of idolatry in Samaria," he said, "but this is beyond all imagination. How can such people repent?"

"Easily enough," said Zophar, "if they had a good scare, for they are exceedingly superstitious. If one with authority could make them believe that their city was to be destroyed, as was Sodom, I believe they would go to fasting at once to save themselves."

"Would their repentance endure?" asked Jonah, thinking of the danger that threatened his beloved land.

"Yea, with some," replied Zophar. "This generation, at least, would not forget, if it was terrible enough."

"One of the men in our caravan said that the Assyrians are cruel and brutish," interposed Jonah. "I have heard that they would torture

or kill a messenger with such a threatening message."

"Not now. They would in times of war, but now all is peaceful and they have given themselves up to debauchery until I think their rounds of evil pleasures must have about run their course."

"But how could they listen, or understand, if they are always drunken?" asked Jonah.

"Indeed they could now!" exclaimed Zophar. "Did not I tell thee they are frightened into soberness already by the strange story from Samaria? They half expect a messenger even yet."

"They do!" exclaimed Jonah.

"I believe," continued Zophar, not noticing Jonah's remark, "if that fellow whom the sailors threw into the sea could appear unto them, the whole city would repent in a day."

"How could it come to pass so quickly?" Jonah asked.

"Easily if a messenger could come before they forget it all."

"But it would take a long time to convince so many people," insisted Jonah.

"Not at all," exclaimed Zophar. "He would not need to argue with them. They know their sin."

"What message could he bring them?" asked Jonah.

"Judgment! Judgment!" said Zophar ex-

citedly. "They are even now afraid it is coming and all they need is a prophet's voice to say the words. They will clothe themselves in sackcloth at once."

"What will become of them if they do not repent?" asked Jonah.

"The whole nation will be in ruin. Even at this present time the king and his ministers of state are unfit to rule because of wine. The soldiers are losing their skill and one of these days Babylon, Syria, or Persia will rise up and conquer them with a single stroke."

"They deserve just that," said Jonah. "They have been so cruel to us all."

"'Tis true, perhaps," replied Zophar slowly, "but should they not have a chance as well as we?"

"From a child I have feared them," said Jonah.

"They have greatly wronged me," continued Zophar sadly, "but I wish them no ill when I remember that their priests have made them what they are."

The sudden barking of the shepherds' dogs reminded them of the lateness of the hour.

"I thank thee, Zophar, for thy words about Nineveh; they will profit me much, for I am a stranger there."

"My peace go with thee," returned Zophar as they parted.

The next evening, Ishmael's caravan halted a short distance outside the great Assyrian metropolis.

"We shall camp here to-night and be ready to go into the city early in the morning," said Ishmael.

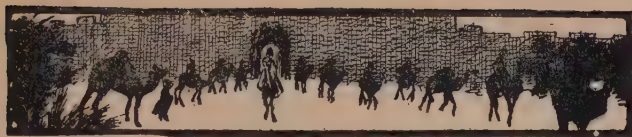
"'Tis well," responded Phorantas. "I have observed that the best time to meet the men with whom I do my business is in the morning. When the sun hath risen warm they grow tired and seek their couches."

"It is not so with the officials," declared Ishmael. "They sleep till the morning is gone because of their wine feasts at night."

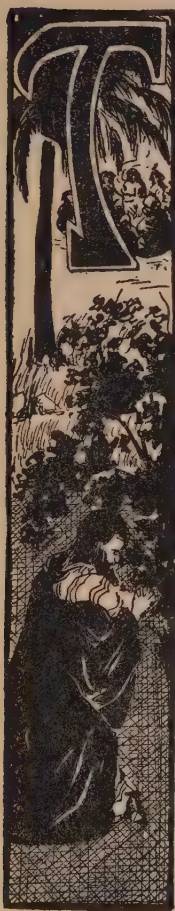
When the camp assembled that evening, Jonah was not there. The awful task before him began to weigh upon his soul and he sought a place of quietness. "Jehovah, I am in Thy hands," he prayed. "Thou hast sent me here to warn this wicked nation which hath wronged Thee and Thy people Israel. What shall Thy servant say on the morrow?"

A gentle peace, such as he felt in his home in Gath-hepher, settled over his soul and the words came back: "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." "It is the same call," he said. "Jehovah is here, even in a heathen land. He hath not left me alone. My soul doth magnify Thee, O Thou God of Israel."

Though Jonah received no message to utter on the morrow, he felt confident that when the time came Jehovah would supply the words. Had not He commanded, "Preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee"? "Such a promise should suffice for a prophet," he said, as he returned to the camp.



XX. A City in Sackcloth



THE next morning came clear and beautiful and the men of the caravan were up early arranging the wares for the market. Jonah was astir with the rest but he did not talk much for he was absorbed in his mission to Nineveh.

Ishmael commanded all to make haste, saying, "It will be late before we cross the river and reach the city."

The merchants and their servants worked busily under the inspiration of the thought that in a few hours their long journey would be over and they would be within the walls of the most famous city of the East. Camels and donkeys were soon loaded with their packs and the long line stretched out over the desert on its last march. The morning was well advanced when they reached the city gate with its throngs of people passing to and fro.

Ishmael beckoned to Jonah to

follow, and took him to an humble inn near the entrance to the city where travellers often stayed. "Here is where we lodge," he said. Then pointing to a large open square far in the distance he exclaimed, "There is one of the great temples, and beyond it are the palaces ; thou shouldst see them first."

"I thank thee for thy hospitable care," replied Jonah heartily, as Phorantas came up behind them.

"Thou wilt find much to interest thee here," said the newcomer, dismounting from his camel.

"And more," laughed Ishmael. "If thou goest into that temple thou wilt see sights which will cause thee to preach the righteousness thou hast spoken of." With a wave of the hand they parted and Jonah turned towards the temple.

Strange sights, indeed, met his eyes. Many of the carvings that adorned the structure were rude and immodest. Sinful scenes were actually chiselled in the cold stone to last for generations and pollute the minds of youths. It was a feast-day to the gods and throngs of men and women were passing in and out of the temple doors. Drunken priests in flowing robes mingled with the throng, some selling offerings for the worship, others peddling ornaments representing the temple which they said were charms to keep away all sickness and disease. Lewd women, dedicated to the gods, jested with the priests in

vulgar language. Approaching Jonah with familiar manners they tried to lead even him away. Some suggested that he might enjoy a drink of choicest wine while others sought to enlist his interest in the worship of the patron god of the day.

Jonah's spirit was stirred. Never had he seen people sunken so low. "Why must the earth be cursed like this?" he thought. "Why does not God blot out such a city, as He did Sodom and Gomorrah, for no city has done greater evil than this. If ever this vile nation captures Israel, God's people will be swallowed up as was I by the great fish." For a few moments he stood watching the throng. "They worship without heart," said he as he observed them toss their coins into the priest's box, bow before a hateful image and then turn away without the slightest consciousness of real worship. "This is awful, awful!" he cried just as a drunken priest jostled against him and then urged him to purchase some sacred things to offer before the idols.

He could endure the sight no longer. He felt forced to speak. Leaping upon the stairs leading to the temple he cried aloud.

The throng stopped as by magic. His strange prophet's garb now meant more to them than when he was jostled in the throng.

Again he cried, "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" The people looked at

each other aghast. The words flew from mouth to mouth—"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

"Art thou from Samaria?" exclaimed one.

Jonah bowed assent.

"Art thou the man who wast thrown into the sea?" asked another excitedly.

"Thou sayest," replied Jonah.

The excitement grew intense as the word passed through the temple throng. Some wept, some cursed, while many began calling upon their gods for help. Jonah passed quickly down the stairs and out into the street. His heart seemed like a burning coal. He could not hold his peace. "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" he cried with desperate earnestness.

All day he walked through the streets of the city uttering his terrible warning. Men's faces grew white as his stirring words fell on their ears, yet no one attempted to do him injury. They seemed to think only of themselves. Near one of the great public buildings he saw some slaves at work. "They look like Syrians. They are Syrians! O Jehovah," he cried, "Thou seest this and wilt Thou permit Thy chosen people to suffer such degradation in this heathen land?"

The news of the prophet's coming and message spread over the city with remarkable speed.

Every one felt himself bound to make it known to all he met.

"Nineveh be overthrown!" exclaimed an old man who caught the last words of the message. "Why, what meaneth this? Is there an army at our gates?"

"No, worse than an army," replied a bystander, who knew the story. "A prophet proclaims the destruction of our city because of our wickedness."

"That is what I have always declared would come!" said the patriarch, wringing his hands. "Many times have I told my sons that this great wickedness would yet be the downfall of our beautiful Nineveh—but they only laughed me to scorn and said I was too old to enjoy life any longer."

"They will find out soon now," remarked the bystander, "for the prophet said it would be only forty days."

"Forty days!" repeated the old man as he hobbled away to carry the warning to his unruly sons. "Would that my sons would listen to me. They care for nothing I say," groaned the grief-stricken father. "If thou hadst trained them when they were young, they would listen to thee now," his conscience seemed to declare. "'Thou hast lived for wealth alone and hast lost thy sons. Now they are helping to bring this curse upon the city.' I, too, am guilty," he said.

The tidings reached the king before midday.

An attendant hastening in and bowing before him said: "A strange man hath reached the city who says, 'In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown.'"

"The gods forbid!" the king exclaimed. Then calling loudly for the eunuch who attended him, he commanded: "Summon the minister of state at once." The official came in breathless haste.

"Is our city in danger?" cried the king. "What meaneth this I hear?"

"A man from Samaria hath alarmed the city," replied the minister.

"Is he a soldier?" demanded the king.

"Far from it. He is a poor man and clothed with camels' hair."

"A prophet!" cried the king, deeply affected. "What hath he said?"

"He hath but one cry,—a warning!"

"Give me the words."

"Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" repeated the minister.

"The gods forbid! Where is the man now?"

"I sought him long and found him going towards the eastern gate crying these words as he went."

"What saith the people who hear him?"

"They are stricken as with a plague and have clothed themselves with sackcloth."

"What thinkest thou of the man?"

"He saith he was cast into the sea for refusing to come at the first. Thou rememberest the sailors' story."

"If that be true, he must be a prophet of the God of the Hebrews!" exclaimed the king with a groan of terror.

"Is their God a God of might?" asked the minister.

"He is terrible. He destroyeth whole armies without men or weapons."

"I never beheld the work of such a God."

"Hast thou not heard how Syria's great army fled from Samaria when not a sword was drawn?"

"I now remember it. Is this prophet the man who wrought such a deed?" asked the minister.

"No, his name was Elisha. He was never here," replied the king. "He sleeps with his fathers."

"Dost thou fear this man?" inquired the minister.

"We have reason to fear all the prophets of the Hebrews. They are true men and their God is Lord over all."

"If that be true then we should worship Him, and cast away these dumb images of ours."

"Thou speakest well, for these drunken feasts before our gods will surely cause the ruin of ourselves and nation."

"It may be that if we would worship the God

of the prophet He would not destroy us," said the minister.

"It is our only hope," declared the king, rising from his throne and laying aside his robes. Though he usually issued his edicts without consulting others he chose not to do so now. "Send to me the scribe and the nobles," he commanded.

In a moment they were in the council chamber. The king addressed them saying, "Thou knowest how our city is given up to wickedness, and how the warning of the prophet hath come to us this day? We have no time to lose. If we turn unto the God who sends the warning and worship Him we may escape this doom. We have much hope if we obey Him, for this very prophet was cast into the sea because he would not obey his God. He repented before death came and his God delivered him. By this strange miracle the prophet is a sign of hope to us."

"O king, live forever!" exclaimed one of the nobles. "We desire thee to issue an edict to the people of Nineveh commanding them to fast and repent of their sins and to worship this God of gods."

"So be it!" exclaimed all the nobles as with one voice.

The scribe sat before the king and wrote as he spake: "Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock taste anything; let them not feed nor drink water; but let man and beast be covered with

sackcloth and cry mightily unto God ; yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will return and repent and turn away from His fierce anger, that we perish not ?”

The scribes throughout the palace assembled and each copied the edict with great haste. Runners seized the half-dried tablets and hastened away to post them in prominent places throughout the city. Throngs gathered around them. Those who could not read besought others to make known to them the writing.

By nightfall the whole city was in mourning. Weird wailing was heard in every home as if death had entered and claimed its victim suddenly. Shops were closed and business was suspended. The streets became desolate except where groups gathered to discuss the terrible situation. Men repented and paid their long-standing debts ; debauchery ceased and some merchants even cast their wine into the street. Idols were taken from their niches in the homes and dashed to pieces on the pavement or thrown into the river that flowed hard by the city.

In one short day Nineveh had been transformed from a place of debauchery to a city of repentance and mourning. The rough sackcloth was worn by all, from the least to the greatest, as an evidence of repentance, and with it a universal appeal for mercy went up to the

God of the prophet. Even the king covered himself with this coarse garment of humility and sat in ashes.

To Jonah it was a strange and tragic sight. He saw the tablet edicts posted and learned their contents; he watched the faces of the people turn pale as they read them; he saw some fall on their knees to pray, while others hastened away to petition their gods. The sight touched him and he began to feel a sense of pity for them in their helplessness, but never could he quite cast off the fear that one day they might destroy his people.

"It was the 'forty days' that did it," he said. "Jehovah knew it when He gave me the words. But what about my utterance, 'in forty days'? Repentance hath come even now," said he, "but that was not my prophecy. The people believe this place is to be destroyed according to my word. If their repentance be genuine, I know Jehovah will be merciful and forgive and turn away His fierce anger. Then my words will fall to the ground and I shall be mocked and the land of Israel be again in danger."

Through the long hours of the night the wail of the penitent could be heard in thousands of homes. So earnest did they become that the sorrow of the city was heard far outside the wall, and sounded like the groanings of the dying on some awful field of battle. Those terrible words,

"in forty days," kept the city awake all night. The terrified inhabitants believed it would come true, but Jonah was fearful lest it should fail.

The wailing and moaning continued all the next day and business was at a standstill. "It is truly genuine," said Jonah, who was familiar with the wail of the professional mourner of his day. "This mourning of Nineveh is from the heart; my words are lost. Every wail seems to be an appeal to Jehovah." It wore away the prophet's courage of soul. Every hour he felt more sure that Nineveh would not be destroyed. "I must leave," he exclaimed, "or these people will be appealing to me to intercede for them before Jehovah. I am no advocate, especially for such as these."

The result of Nineveh's repentance was as Nineveh hoped and Jonah feared. "God saw their works that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that He said He would do unto them, and He did it not."

It was not many days before the terrible suspense which struck the city like a tornado began to grow less in severity. The faces of the people showed that their terror of mind was abating and in its place there was a sincerity and restfulness which foretold that the city would be saved. "But it displeased Jonah exceedingly and he was very angry; and he prayed unto the Lord and said, 'I pray Thee, O Lord, was not this my

saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish : for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil. Therefore now, O Lord, take, I beseech Thee, my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.'

"Then said the Lord, 'Doeest thou well to be angry?' So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shadow till he might see what would become of the city.

"And the Lord God prepared a gourd and made it to come up over Jonah that it might be a shadow over his head to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd.

"But God prepared a worm when the morning arose next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.

"And it came to pass when the sun did rise that God prepared a vehement east wind, and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah that he fainted and wished in himself to die, and said, 'It is better for me to die than to live.'

"And God said to Jonah, 'Doeest thou well to be angry for the gourd?' And he said, 'I do well to be angry, even unto death.' Then saith the Lord, 'Thou hast had pity on the gourd for which thou didst not labour neither madest it to grow ; which came up in a night and perished in

a night. And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city wherein are more than sixscore thousand people that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle ? ” ”

This tender plea of God for a heathen nation silenced the prophet. He could find no argument of defense and it made him wish he could flee away. “ Would that I were in Gath-hepher,” he sighed. “ There remaineth nothing for me in this lonely place.”

As he thought thereon his feelings seemed to change. The familiar names of “ Israel,” “ Gath-hepher,” and “ Peninnah ” took hold of his very soul and made him weep. The weeping did him good for it softened his heart, turning his mind towards his native land and arousing him from his despondency. Springing to his feet he started for the city gate where he hoped to discover a caravan returning to the land of Israel. Nor did it take long to find one, for the traffic was abundant at that season of the year.

Day after day the caravan moved with steady pace towards the west, making his heart lighter and happier as the distance that separated him from home melted away. “ The journey back seemeth much shorter than the one to Nineveh,” said he to one of the company as the caravan approached the lake.

“ Thinkest thou that I cannot divine the reason ? ” replied the merchant with a smile. “ Thou

hast thy family here and this is thy native land. Thy heart beateth with longing to see thy home again."

"Thou hast never spoken truer words," exclaimed Jonah with a laugh. "Perchance thou judgest me by thyself."

"Nay," replied the merchant sadly. "My home lieth beyond Nineveh towards the great sea of Assyria. Two months, and more, must pass before I see mine own again," said he as he bent forward, a little downcast, and gently patted his camel on the neck.

When they reached Gennesaret Jonah hastened to the inn and engaged a beast to take him on to his home.

The reunion in Gath-hepher was a joyful home-coming. Jonah seemed to his family as one alive from the dead, for to them he had passed through the furnace of affliction and even the grave itself. He was a changed man. His stubborn spirit seemed broken and his heart made tender. The longed-for home was once more filled with sacred happiness.

Hearing Jonah had returned, Nathan made haste to see him. "Thou hast done a great work," said he as he warmly greeted the prophet at his home.

"I rejoice that it is over," said Jonah gratefully. "I can now rest without my mind driving me from my couch."

"Yea and better still," exclaimed Nathan. "Jehovah can use thee now again in Israel. The nation is greatly reduced and the land impoverished. My son told me but yesterday, when he came from Samaria, that our king, Jeroboam II, is sorely troubled because the kingdoms at the north have made us their prey."

"'Tis because he followeth not after Jehovah," replied Jonah with a touch of personal recollection. "Let him turn from his evil ways and Jehovah will deliver him. Thou rememberest that I spake of this before departing for Nineveh."

"Yea, and I would that thou couldst now tell the king thy words," urged Nathan.

"Thy desire may soon be granted," replied Jonah thoughtfully, "for I must needs go to Samaria soon, and if Jehovah wills it I shall visit the palace."

"Do so, my son, and may the God of Israel be with thee all thy days," said the aged villager as he lifted himself slowly from his seat and moved towards the door. Pausing, he said, "Jonah, my son, mine eyes may not look upon thee oft, for my days are few and my steps feeble. But suffer me this word. I shall go down to my grave rejoicing that thou hast again obtained favour with God."

After fourteen days Jonah arose and went to Samaria and on the morrow prepared himself to visit the king. When the set time had come

he presented himself before the door of the palace and was given audience with Jeroboam, who received him graciously, and asked many questions concerning his welfare.

"It hath been told me," said Jonah, "that thou art greatly cast down because Israel hath lost much land along the northern border?"

"Yea, it hath burdened me much," replied the king soberly. "Israel hath been so impoverished that we know not but our land may all be taken from us."

"Never," exclaimed Jonah, "if we worship Jehovah."

Jeroboam shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Israel hath never suffered unless first she sinned, and Jehovah will now restore her to her former greatness if she will but turn and repent."

"Thinkest thou we should recover the borders that have been taken from us?" asked the king eagerly.

"Yea, that hath Jehovah shown me," replied the prophet assuringly. "Thou shalt recover thy land from the entering in of Hamath even unto the sea of the plain."

Jeroboam's face grew radiant. "Thy speech comforteth me more than armies," he exclaimed excitedly. "Now shall I not fear, for I know that thy word is truth even as the word of Elisha."

Jonah departed from the presence of the king

with great joy. "My life hath been renewed as the eagle's," he said to himself. 24,907

Stepping out from the palace gate he came face to face with an aged man leaning on his staff. At first Jonah thought to pass without observing if he knew him, when the man looked up. It was Elkanah. They clasped each other with a warm embrace of reconciliation.

Jonah was first to speak. "Jehovah hath restored me to His love," he exclaimed, "wilt thou forgive me also, my father?"

"Yea, my son; thou hast not injured me, but could I hold bitterness in my heart when the God of Israel forgiveth? I rejoice that thou hast found Jehovah once more."

"Yea, and never again will I follow after 'lying vanities' or bring such a gloom of darkness upon my soul by doubting the wisdom of Him who hath shown such mercy to the wayward and such love even to those who were once mine enemies."

Tears came into the old man's eyes and his lips quivered with emotion. "Jonah," said he, tenderly, "thou hast found the secret of those who have wrought mighty works in Jehovah's name. Guard thou the gift, for with it what thou doest cannot perish, but shall abide forever and ever."

"God's way is best," replied Jonah humbly. "May He bring to pass His will in me and thee, and His righteous purpose in all the world."

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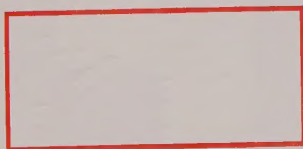
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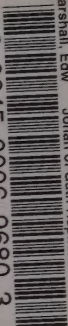
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